

VISUAL QUALITY POLICIES

The County will:

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

4.1 Protection of Visual Quality

- a. Protect and enhance the natural visual quality of San Mateo County.
- b. Encourage positive visual quality for all development and minimize adverse visual impacts.
- c. Encourage citizen awareness and interest in San Mateo County's scenic resources.

4.2 Protection of Shorelines

- a. Protect and enhance the visual quality of and from shorelines of bodies of water including lakes, reservoirs, streams, bays, ocean, sloughs.
- b. Maximize the preservation of significant public ocean views.

4.3 Protection of Vegetation

Minimize the removal of visually significant trees and vegetation to accommodate structural development.

4.4 Appearance of Rural and Urban Development

Promote aesthetically pleasing development in rural and urban areas.

DEFINITIONS

4.5 Definition of Development

Define development as the construction, reconstruction, conversion, relocation or enlargement of any structure; the division of a parcel of land into two or more parcels; any mining, excavation, landfill or land disturbance; and changes in land uses.

4.6 Definition of Structure

Define a structure as anything constructed for use or occupancy whether constructed or erected on, above, or below the surface of land or water. This

does not include roads, paved areas or temporary structures. Temporary structures are without a foundation or footings and can be removed when the designated time or use for which the structure was erected has ceased.

4.7 Definition of Ridgelines and Skylines

- a. Define ridgelines as the tops of hills or hillocks normally viewed against a background of other hills.
- b. Define skylines as the line where sky and land masses meet.

4.8 Definition of Visual Resources

Define visual resources as those attractive visible elements of the natural and developed landscape, such as landforms, vegetative forms, water bodies, structures and communities.

4.9 Definition of Visual Quality

Define visual quality as the visual attributes of natural landscapes, structures and communities.

4.10 Definition of Public View

Define public view as a range of vision from a public road or other public facility.

4.11 Definition of Scenic Road

Define a scenic road as a designated travel route providing outstanding views of natural landscapes and attractive man-made development.

4.12 Definition of Scenic Corridors

Define a scenic corridor as land adjacent to a scenic road right-of-way which, when seen from the road, provides outstanding views of natural landscapes and attractive man-made development.

4.13 Definition of Distributed Energy Resources

Define distributed energy resources as small, modular energy generation and storage technologies that provide electric capacity or energy located on-site or close to where it is needed, whether connected to the local electric power grid or isolated in stand-alone applications. These systems generally produce less than 10 megawatts (MW) of power and include wind turbines, photovoltaics (PV), fuel cells, microturbines, and energy storage systems.

GENERAL POLICIES

4.14 Public Education

Encourage private citizen awareness and interest in protecting the visual quality of the County through educational programs.

4.15 Appearance of New Development

- a. Regulate development to promote and enhance good design, site relationships and other aesthetic considerations.
- b. Regulate land divisions to promote visually attractive development.

4.16 Supplemental Design Guidelines for Communities

Encourage the preparation of supplemental site and architectural design guidelines for communities that include, but are not limited to, criteria that reflect local conditions, characteristics and design objectives and are flexible enough to allow individual creativity.

4.17 Protections for Coastal Features

Regulate coastal development to protect and enhance natural landscape features and visual quality through measures that ensure the basic integrity of sand dunes, cliffs, bluffs and wetlands.

4.18 Oil and Gas Well Operations

Regulate the appearance of oil and gas well operations to protect against damaging visual quality through measures which limit the size of the pad and require equipment to be screened, painted and limited in height. To the greatest extent practicable, require revegetation and restoration.

4.19 Surface Mining Operations

Regulate surface mining operations to protect visual quality through measures requiring revegetation and restoration, to the extent practicable.

4.20 Large Agricultural Structures

Use appropriate landscaping wherever necessary and feasible to mitigate the negative impacts of large agricultural structures (i.e., greenhouses, storage buildings, etc.) from public view.

4.21 Utility Structures

Minimize the adverse visual quality of utility structures, including roads, roadway and building signs, overhead wires, utility poles, T.V. antennae, distributed energy resources, solar water heaters, and satellite dishes.

4.22 Scenic Corridors

Protect and enhance the visual quality of scenic corridors by managing the location and appearance of structural development.

4.23 Forest Lands

Protect the basic scenic character of forest lands by promoting the regulation of thinning and commercial harvesting.

RURAL AREAS

4.24 Rural Development Design Concept

Regulate the location and siting of structures in rural areas to encourage positive visual quality in relation to the scenic character of the natural landscape.

RURAL SITE PLANNING

4.25 Location of Structures

- a. Locate, site and design all structures and paved areas to carefully conform with the natural vegetation, landforms and topography of the site so that their presence is compatible with the pre-existing character of the site.
- b. Locate and design future structures to minimize the impacts of noise, light, glare and odors on adjacent properties and roads.
- c. Locate structures adjacent to or in forested areas rather than in open grasslands, wherever possible and make compatible with timber harvesting activities and use of solar energy.

4.26 Earthwork Operations

- a. Keep grading or earth-moving operations to a minimum.
- b. Where grading is necessary, make graded areas blend with adjacent landforms through the use of contour grading rather than harsh cutting or terracing of the site.

4.27 Water Bodies

- a. Allow for the development of approved dams and impoundments and stream clearance operations.
- b. Discourage structures which would adversely impact the appearance of a stream and associated riparian habitat.
- c. Discourage the alteration of streams and other natural drainage systems which would affect their appearance, reduce underground water recharge, or cause drainage, erosion or flooding problems.

4.28 Ridgelines and Skyline

- a. Discourage structures on open ridgelines and skylines, when seen as part of a public view in order to preserve visual integrity.
- b. Allow structures on open ridgelines and skylines as part of a public view when no alternative building site exists.
- c. Require structures on ridgelines in forested areas, which are part of a public view to: (1) blend with the existing silhouette; (2) not break or cause gaps within the ridgeline silhouette by removing tree masses; and (3) relate to the ridgeline form.
- d. Define public view as a range of vision from a public road or other public facility.

4.29 Trees and Vegetation

- a. Preserve trees and natural vegetation except where removal is required for approved development or safety.
- b. Replace vegetation and trees removed during construction wherever possible. Use native plant materials or vegetation compatible with the surrounding vegetation, climate, soil, ecological characteristics of the region and acceptable to the California Department of Forestry.
- c. Provide special protection to large and native trees.

4.30 Landscaping and Screening

- a. Provide a smooth transition between development and adjacent forested or open space areas through the use of landscaping.

- b. Limit landscaping in open grasslands to areas immediately surrounding structures.
- c. Where it is appropriate to screen uses from view, use natural vegetation rather than solid fencing.

4.31 Public Utilities

Encourage the placement of new and existing public utility lines underground.

4.32 Roads

Locate and develop roads which are integrated well with the physical environment.

4.33 Rural Design Review District

Regulate the site planning of all development in rural areas by using a consolidated set of design standards.

RURAL SERVICE CENTERS AND SUBDIVISIONS

4.34 Rural Service Centers Design Concept

Ensure that future development in rural service centers occurs in an orderly and harmonious fashion which is compatible with established architectural character, design standards, and character of the surrounding natural environment.

4.35 Rural Subdivisions Design Concept

Encourage new development in rural subdivisions to be compatible with established architectural styles and patterns of development present in adjacent older structures and to respect the character of the surrounding natural landscape.

URBAN AREAS

4.36 Urban Area Design Concept

- a. Maintain and, where possible, improve upon the appearance and visual character of development in urban areas.
- b. Ensure that new development in urban areas is designed and constructed to contribute to the orderly and harmonious development of the locality.

4.37 Improving Visual Quality in Urban Areas

Conduct special studies in unincorporated urban areas to identify and mitigate design problems in commercial and mixed density residential areas.

URBAN DEVELOPMENT DESIGN REGULATIONS

4.38 Urban Design Review District

Develop design review regulations which incorporate guidelines on managing design problems found in predominantly urban areas.

4.39 Commercial Signs and Outdoor Advertisements

Regulate commercial signs and outdoor advertising by using a consolidated set of standards.

SCENIC ROADS AND CORRIDORS

4.40 Scenic Roads

Give special recognition and protection to travel routes in rural and unincorporated urban areas which provide outstanding views of scenic vistas, natural landscape features, historical sites and attractive urban development.

4.41 Coordination of Scenic Roadway Standards and Design

Coordinate standards of roadway and right-of-way design, improvements, and maintenance with cities in order to maintain a consistent approach in applying scenic conservation standards.

4.42 Role of the Cities in Urban Scenic Corridor Regulation

Encourage cities to give special recognition and regulation to development in designated scenic corridors within their jurisdiction in order to support and supplement the City, County and State network of scenic roads.

4.43 Criteria for Scenic Road Designation

- a. Select a variety of road types irrespective of their traffic functions, as long as the visual quality afforded justifies the selection.
- b. Select roads in rural areas representative of the variety and quality of scenery available in the County such as those which provide views of unusual natural landforms (i.e., exposed rock faces, sea cliffs, steep noticeable slopes, etc.), unique vegetative communities (i.e., large plants

or trees, unusually large groups of plants, heritage trees), the coastline, streams, natural and man-made bodies of water, waterfalls, vista points, structures of architectural interest and open space areas where agricultural operations may be viewed.

- c. Select roads in urban areas which display attractive urban development (i.e., State and County historical sites, singular and multiple structures of architectural interest, engineering constructs, and other archaeological, historical, or cultural sites), and provide views of natural scenery in an urban setting.
- d. Consider routes which provide access to and connect public recreation areas and places of historic and cultural interest.

4.44 Road Design and Construction

- a. Require the design and construction of new roads and road improvements to be sensitive to the visual qualities and character of the scenic corridor. This includes width, alignment, grade, slope, grading, and drainage facilities.
- b. Encourage the construction and maintenance of scenic turnouts, selective clearing of vegetation to open new vistas, development of picnic and rest areas at selected locations along the scenic road system.

4.45 Designation of Scenic Roads and Corridors

- a. Designate those State and County travel routes listed in Table 4.6 as Scenic Roads.
- b. Designate those portions of land shown on the Map of Scenic Corridors abutting either side of select rural travel routes as Scenic Corridors.

4.46 Scenic Corridor Definition Program

- a. Develop a program to define consistent temporary scenic corridors on either side of the road right-of-way, until a permanent corridor is defined for select travel routes outside the Coastal Zone.
- b. Develop a program for defining permanent scenic corridors using the designation procedure outlined in the Appendix as a guide.

TABLE 4.6

DESIGNATED STATE AND COUNTY SCENIC ROADS

State Designated Routes

- Cabrillo Highway - State Route No. 1 (from southern limits of the City of Half Moon Bay to Santa Cruz County)
- Junipero Serra Freeway - Interstate Route No. 280 (from Millbrae to Santa Clara County)
- Skyline Boulevard - State Route No. 35 (from State Route No. 92 to Santa Clara County)

County Designated Routes

- Alameda de las Pulgas - (from Woodside Road to Crystal Springs Road)
 - Alpine Road - (from Alameda de las Pulgas to Portola Road and from Skyline Boulevard to Pescadero Road)
 - Cabrillo Highway - (from Junipero Serra Freeway to northern limits of the City of Half Moon Bay)
 - Canada Road
 - Canyon Road - (from Skyline Boulevard to Easton Drive)
 - Cloverdale Road
 - Crystal Springs Road
 - John Daly Boulevard
 - Junipero Serra Freeway - (from San Francisco to San Bruno)
 - Easton Drive - (from Canyon Road to El Camino Real)
 - Edgewood Road - (from Alameda de las Pulgas to Canada Road)
 - El Camino Real - (from Easton Drive to Crystal Springs Road)
 - Gazos Creek Road - (from Cabrillo Highway to Cloverdale Road)
 - Guadalupe Canyon Parkway
 - Half Moon Bay Road - State Route No. 92
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TABLE 4.6 (continued)

DESIGNATED STATE AND COUNTY SCENIC ROADS

Higgins-Purisima Road

Kings Mountain Road

La Honda Road - State Route No. 84

Pescadero Road

Polhemus Road

Portola Road

Portola State Park Road

Purisima Creek Road

Ralston Avenue - (from Alameda de las Pulgas to J. Arthur Younger Freeway)

Sand Hill Road

Sharp Park Road

Skyline Boulevard - (from San Francisco to Half Moon Bay Road)

Stage Road

Tunitas Creek Road

Westborough Boulevard - (from Skyline Boulevard to Junipero Serra Freeway)

Woodside Road - State Route No. 84 (from Alameda de las Pulgas to La Honda Road)

J. Arthur Younger Freeway - State Route No. 92

4.47 Regulation of Development in Scenic Corridors

Institute special controls to regulate both site and architectural design of structures located within rural scenic corridors in order to protect and enhance the visual quality of select rural landscapes.

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN STANDARDS FOR RURAL SCENIC CORRIDORS

4.48 Topography and Vegetation

Design structures which conform to the natural topography and blend rather than conflict with the natural vegetation.

4.49 Scale

Design structures which are compatible in size and scale with their building site and surrounding environment, including adjacent man-made or natural features.

4.50 Lot Coverage

Limit lot coverage for parcels five acres or less in size in rural areas.

4.51 Stack, Vents and Antennae

Group stacks, vents, antennae, satellite dishes and other equipment together, to the extent feasible, and place them in the least viewable location. Where appropriate, screen antennae and satellite dishes from view.

4.52 Colors and Materials

Depending on the design problems of the site, use colors and materials which: (1) blend with or complement the surrounding natural environment, (2) do not dominate or overpower the site, (3) are compatible with the size, scale, and architectural style of the structure, and (4) with the exception of greenhouses, are not highly reflective.

4.53 Height

- a. Limit the height of structures or appurtenances in forested areas so as not to exceed the height of the forest canopy.
- b. Limit the height of structures in grassland areas in order to maintain a low horizontal profile.
- c. Allow distributed energy resources, and chimneys to extend beyond these height limits where required for safety or efficient operation.

4.54 Accessory Structures

Design accessory structures to be:

- a. Architecturally compatible with main structures; and
- b. Where feasible, located in the immediate vicinity of main structures.

4.55 Commercial Signs

- a. Limit on- and off-site outdoor commercial advertising, including billboards, in order to protect visual quality.
- b. Design signs to harmonize in color and materials with:
 - (1) the architectural character of the structure it identifies; and
 - (2) the visual qualities of the natural surroundings.
- c. Integrate signs with the architectural design of the building and do not extend them above the roofline of the structure.
- d. Prohibit bright or self-illuminated, rotating, moving, reflective, blinking or flashing signs.
- e. Discourage permanent use of pennants or streamers.

SITE PLANNING FOR RURAL SCENIC CORRIDORS

4.56 Building Setbacks

- a. Prevent the obstruction of important views by setting buildings in rural scenic corridors back from the road right-of-way, unless topographic features or the size of the site makes it infeasible or unnecessary.
- b. Consider a variety of setbacks; however, establish minimum distance.

4.57 Cluster Development

In scenic corridors, discourage high density clustering or grouping of residential uses which are highly visible from the road.

4.58 Tree and Vegetation Removal

- a. Allow the removal of trees and natural vegetation when done in accordance with existing regulations.

- b. Prohibit the removal of more than 50% of the tree coverage except as allowed by permit.

4.59 Views

To the extent practicable, locate development in scenic corridors so it does not obstruct views from scenic roads or disrupt the visual harmony of the natural landscape.

4.60 Outdoor Lighting

Minimize exterior lighting in scenic corridors and, where used, employ warm colors rather than cool tones and shield the scenic corridor from glare.

4.61 Roads and Driveways

- a. Design and construct new roads, road improvements and driveways to be sensitive to the visual qualities and character of the scenic corridor, including such factors as width, alignment, grade, slope, grading and drainage facilities.
- b. Limit number of access roads connecting to a scenic road to the greatest extent possible.
- c. Share driveways where possible to reduce the number of entries onto scenic roads.

4.62 Parking and Paved Areas

Integrate paved areas with their site, encourage the use of alternative paving technologies that minimize hardscape, and landscape and/or screen them to reduce visual impact from the scenic corridor.

4.63 Storage Areas

Screen areas used for the storage of equipment, supplies or debris by fencing, landscaping or other means so they are not visible from scenic roadways, trails, parks, and neighborhoods.

4.64 Utilities in State Scenic Corridors

- a. Install new distribution lines underground.

- b. Install existing overhead distribution lines underground where they are required to be relocated in conjunction with street improvements, new utility construction, etc.
- c. Consider exceptions where it is not physically practical due to topographic features; however, utilities should not be substantially visible from any public road or developed public trail.

4.65 Utilities in County Scenic Corridors

- a. Install new distribution lines underground.
- b. Consider exceptions for certain circumstances including, but not limited to, financial hardship, topographic conditions or land use conflicts.

4.66 Large Scale Power Transmission Lines

Encourage P.G.& E. to mitigate the adverse visual impact created by large scale power transmission lines.

4.67 Fences

Encourage fences which minimize visual impact.

4.68 Mobile Homes

Prohibit mobile homes on permanent foundations in scenic corridors.

4.69 Rural Scenic Corridor District

Regulate the architectural and site design of structures within scenic corridors by using a consolidated set of design standards.