



CITY OF MONTE SERENO DESIGN GUIDELINES



foreword

Design Guidelines

The City of Monte Sereno is a small residential community on the southwest side of the Santa Clara Valley. Known for its rural residential feel, the City is made up of all single-family residences and community services, which include a church and a school.

This document provides guidelines and design direction that home owners and their architects or designers must reference in the preparation of building and landscape plans. Improvements must be consistent with these Design Guidelines.

Text: City of Monte Sereno

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1. Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the document including the purpose of Design Guidelines, City history and explanation of the Design Guidelines. The chapter also discusses the General Plan goals which guided the development of the Design Guidelines.

1A. Purpose

What's the purpose of this document?

The purpose of this document is to provide design guidance for residential development within the City. The guidelines are for new construction and renovations to existing structures.

The written and graphic illustrations in these guidelines are intended to provide a visual concept and understanding to the City's unique residential characteristics and to promote architectural design which will enhance the City's established neighborhoods.

Who should use this document?

Property owners, developers, architects, building designers and contractors seeking to construct new residential structures or alterations and additions to existing structures should use these guidelines in the early design stage of their projects.

This document will be used by: the Site and Architectural Commission, City Council and City Staff as a tool for evaluating proposed projects. Proposed improvements must be consistent with these Guidelines as required by Municipal Code.

This document is intended to provide guidance toward potential design solutions for the goals, polices and directives contained in the General Plan.

As such, the guidelines provide flexibility for building designers while assuring conformance to the community's vision and goals for development. The goals considered in the development of these guidelines are described below.

Goals

- Goal 1** Harmoniously balanced development with the physical setting i.e., natural resources protected, hazardous area undeveloped and critical public open spaces preserved.
- Goal 2** Preservation and protection of environmental resources which protect the high quality of life in Monte Sereno.
- Goal 3** Preservation of the natural topography and integrity of the creeks, streams and natural drainage within the city.
- Goal 4** Maintain the high level of neighborhood character and pride.
- Goal 5** Maintain existing suburban and semi-rural character in Monte Sereno.
- Goal 6** Encourage energy conserving practices in the maintenance of existing and new structures.

1B. History

Since its beginnings, Monte Sereno has prided its self on the quality of architecture and mature landscaping that defines the City. Monte Sereno has long been considered one of the most desirable places to reside in the Santa Clara Valley. Residents enjoy a variety of topography within the small City from steep mountain areas thick with native Oak and Redwood varieties, to gently sloping area covered in chaparral, and flatter areas crossed by streams.

Monte Sereno started as primarily a rural agricultural area. The area was dotted with ranch houses, orchards, dairies and livestock. The mountain slopes of the southern portion of the City contained summer homes, recreational properties and a few large estates. The beauty and tranquility of the area attracted artist and writers, such as John Steinbeck, looking for peaceful and inspirational place to pursue their craft. Today, there is evidence of old orchards, homes from the early part of the century and one of the last raw milk dairies in California.

Unlike many other cities in the Santa Clara Valley, Monte Sereno did not form on crossroads or from a historical village. Consequently, a commercial core never developed in the City, leaving Monte Sereno strictly residential. During the late nineteen-seventies and early eighties, the Santa Clara Valley experienced a lot of growth which was also felt by Monte Sereno. This growth brought change to the residents of Monte Sereno. The continually evolving nature of residential development, in both new homes and the retrofitting of older homes, reflects the values and vision of the City's residents. The guidelines contained in this document are intended to assist in the manifestation of those values shared by the community. This vision is carried on by today's City leaders who strive to preserve that quality of life for Monte Sereno's future residents.



2. Principles

Monte Sereno residences display a wide range of architectural styles and characteristics. Homes in the City reflect a variety of development conditions, including builders' values and design sensibilities, prevailing architectural styles of different eras, and individual characteristics of particular sites. This chapter lists four principles that homeowners and their architects must consider no matter what design style is desired, which particular neighborhood the project is in or what site constraints may exist. Each of these principles is discussed fully in the following chapters.

2A. Neighborhood Compatibility

This section stresses the importance of designing a project which retains the existing character of the neighborhood. Basic site and architectural design principles are discussed with an emphasis for the appreciation of surrounding properties.

2B. Site Compatibility

The importance of the placement of a new residence, accessory buildings, or additions to existing residence to reduce grading and retention of natural contours and damaging or removing any significant trees is covered in this section. Also, this section explains the advantages to utilizing sustainable building materials and incorporating other environmentally sound building practices.

2C. Physical Design Components

Discussion of the importance of mass and scale, building details and materials and roof treatment to mitigate significant visual impacts are the focus of the section.

2D. Landscaping

The preservation of trees and open space is stressed in this section. Also explained in this section is the City's policy regarding "hardscape" areas such as driveways and walkways. The preservation of public views is also mentioned with discussion of front yard fencing.

3. Neighborhood Compatibility

The key to a successful residential project in Monte Sereno is to assure its compatibility with the surrounding homes in the neighborhood.

What is compatibility?

Having an architectural style, visual bulk, massiveness, height, width and length which is compatible with the neighborhood and which harmonizes with the existing residential structures in the neighborhood and in the case of a building addition, with the existing addition. Compatibility also includes such terms as scale, orientation and architectural elements such as texture, color and building materials.

The neighborhoods in Monte Sereno have defined **characters**. Neighborhood identity should be maintained by designing a project that **complements its surroundings**. See Appendix A for neighborhood definitions.

3A. Design Your Home to Fit the Neighborhood

- 3A1. The character the neighborhood should determine the design of the structure and the placement on the lot. Ultimately, the landscaping will be the finishing touch that will blend the home with its surroundings.
- 3A2. A building's mass, roof form and projecting elements should be designed so as to minimize the visual impact of the building on the neighborhood. Rooflines should be designed in ways that minimize interference with views from neighboring properties.
- 3A3. Buildings and trees should be designed and sited so as to minimize the obstruction of key views from adjacent properties.

3B. Residential Character

- 3B1. Compatibility with a neighborhood character occurs when homes retain their individuality without dominating the neighborhood.



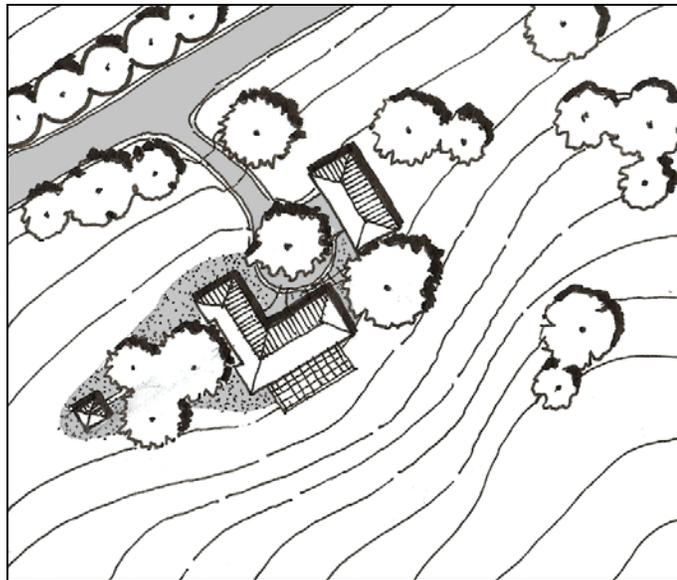
X The house on the left does not have features that harmonize with other existing residential structures, and dominates the neighborhood.

4. Site Compatibility

The existing topographical terrain and established tree cover and plant life contribute greatly to Monte Sereno’s distinctive rural character. This chapter includes guidelines for the treatment of the natural environment and its relationship to the placement and design of new and remodeled homes on the site.

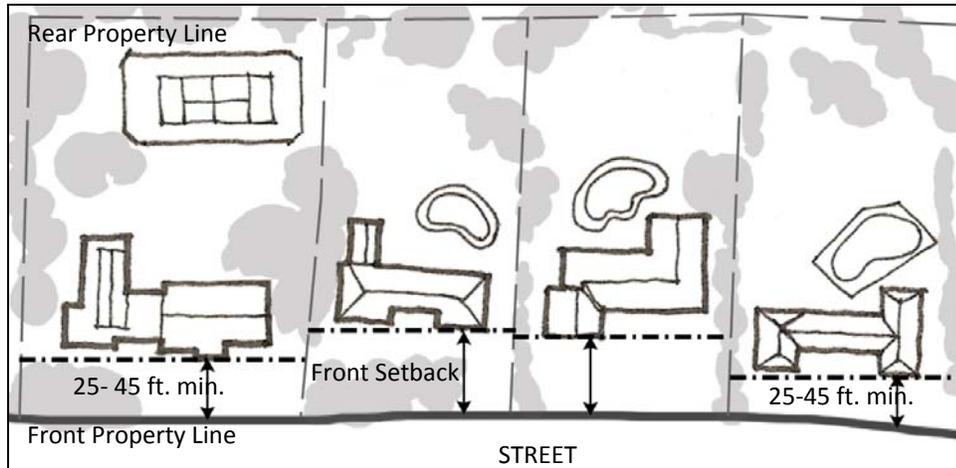
4A. Site Planning Considerations

- 4A1. A building should be designed to be compatible with the natural slope of the land, adapting to the land and reflecting its contours, while preserving all significant, existing trees and vegetation and any other natural site attributes. It is City policy to prevent significant loss of vegetation and trees due to a construction project.



- ✓ **The house is built on the flatter part of the terrain to minimize grading and to protect the natural slope of the property. The house and garage are separated to protect the existing trees.**

- 4A2. Building setbacks should be established that reflect the natural features of the site.



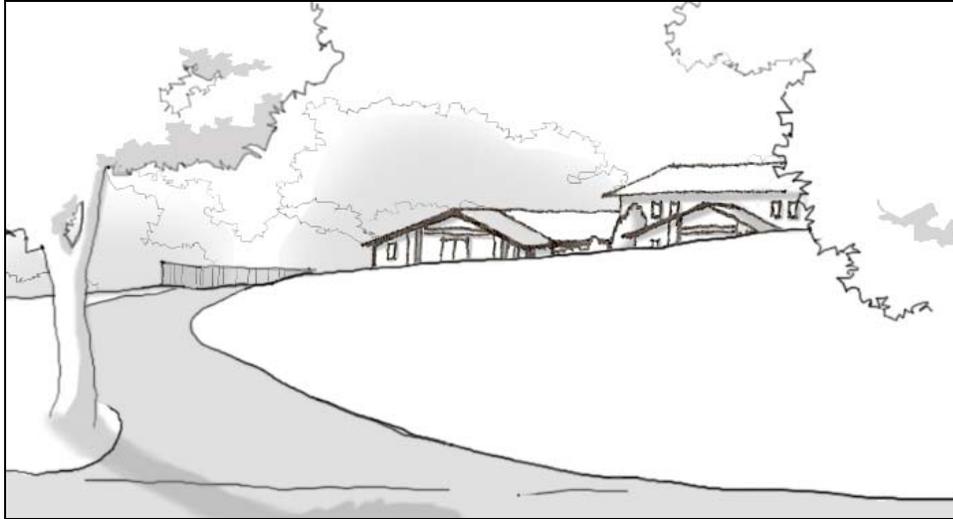
These houses are built at varied setbacks, still meeting City zoning standards, to create neighborhood character.

- 4A3. The size, mass and height of a structure should be in proportion with the size of the property and should also be in scale with nearby structures.

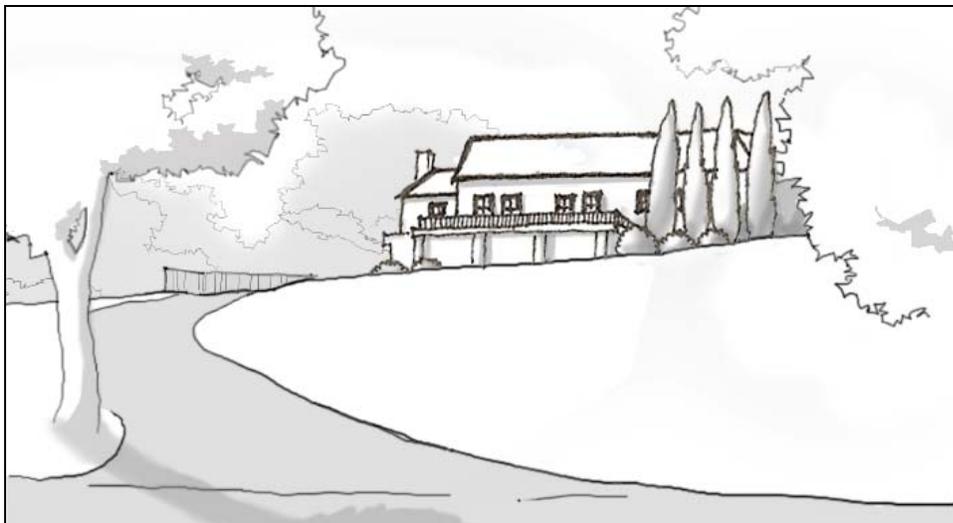


The house in the middle is out of scale with its neighbors. In order to create scale, the house in the middle should de-emphasize the second story elements.

- 4A4. Open space and landscape areas should visually blend with adjacent properties and be consistent with the neighborhood and sensitive to the rural character of the City. Buildings should be orientated so that outdoor space will visually connect between properties and extend a sense of open space, while maintaining a sense of privacy.
- 4A5. A building's mass, roof form and projecting elements should be designed so as to minimize the visual impact of the building on the slope. Rooflines should be designed in ways that minimize interference with views from neighboring properties.

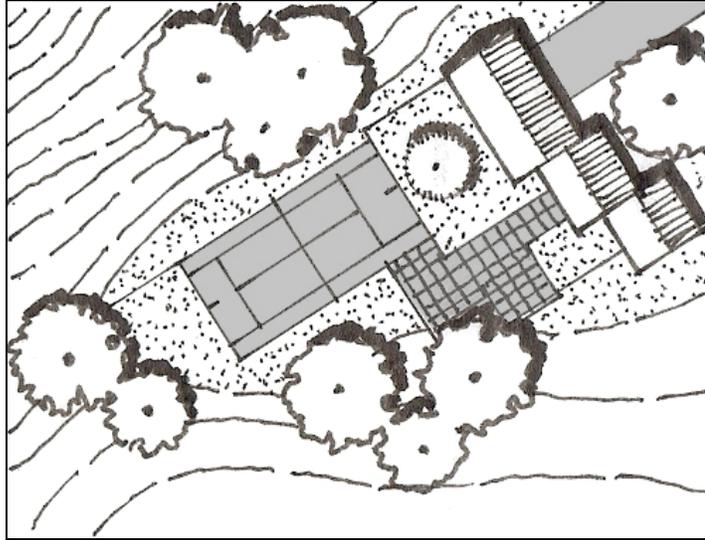


The building's mass and roof form follow the slope of the site.



The building dominates the landscape.

- 4A6. Private open space such as patios, gardens, recreation courts and play areas should be placed in a manner to maximize use of sun and shade patterns, natural drainage and existing trees and vegetation.



- ✓ The tennis court is located on a level portion of the site away from existing trees. The patio utilizes the shade from existing trees.

4B. Design should be Compatible with the Natural Terrain

- 4B1. Integrate the structures and landscaping with the surrounding environment and terrain. Retain the rural countryside feeling and openness of the City's setting. The surrounding natural environment should dominate the visual character of the site.



The natural environment dominates the visual character.

- 4B2. Make the site design compatible with the terrain and blend it into the surroundings.

4B3. Structures on prominent and highly visible hilltops or ridgelines should flow with the land and may be required to be one story.

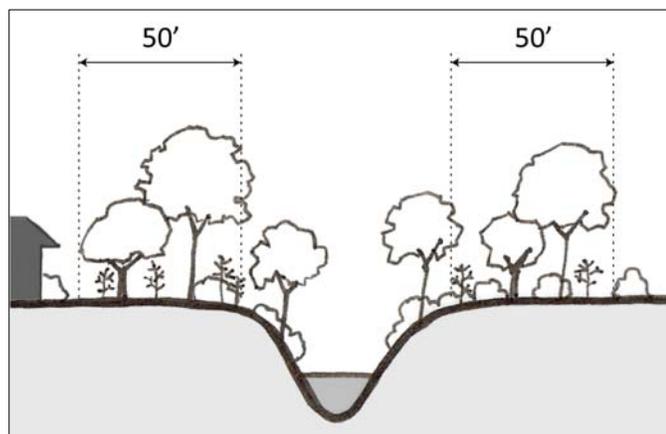


The buildings on the ridgeline flow with the land.

4B4. Build with the contours of the land. This means avoiding excessive grading for yards and landscaping areas of a hillside lot.

4B5. Retain an open setting while developing the site.

4B6. Any proposed construction, alteration or grading within 50 feet from the top of bank of any watercourse or creek shall comply with **Santa Clara Valley Water District Design Guidelines**. See Appendix B, published separately, for complete document.



4C. Natural Features of the Land and Significant Existing Vegetation should be Preserved

- 4C1. On a sloping site, the structure should be stepped down the hill utilizing one story building elements. Avoid cantilevers and stilts over downhill slopes.



The building makes use of one story building elements.



The building uses stilts to support the second story.

- 4C2. Plan outdoor areas and structure location so existing trees and vegetation can be saved.

5. Physical Design Components

5A. Architectural Details

- 5A1. Use architectural details to break up mass. The use of eaves, bay windows, small windows, varying elevations and alcoves reduce the appearance of bulk and are encouraged.
- 5A2. Porches: A porch is a transitional space on the building façade between the external and internal environments of the home. It is a semi-private space that is essentially outdoors yet offers shelter from the elements. Porches are primarily of two forms. They are either inset into the primary mass of a building or built outside the main building as a separate volume that helps mediate the building mass consistent with the building's architectural style.



The porch of this building is inset and makes a transition between the exterior and interior portions of the home.

- 5A3. Eaves: Eaves are a critical component of the junction between the wall plane and the roof plane. Detailing of the eaves should be consistent with the architectural style of the building.



The eaves of this Craftsman house are consistent with the style.

- 5A4. Windows and Doors: The following are guidelines for appropriate front entry treatment:
- i. Smaller entries help create a more human scale to a home and are strongly encouraged.
 - ii. Recessed entries can create an elegant, intimate feel while adding human scale to a home and are encouraged.
 - iii. Front entry doors and decorative elements such as moldings, columns, posts, lighting and build-in benches and planters should be architecturally consistent with the style of the home.

- iv. One-story roofs or overhangs that serve as porches, appropriate to the architectural style, are strongly encouraged.
- v. Large, massive entries that appear two-story are discouraged.
- vi. Single door entries are encouraged.



The above entry treatment illustrates a small, recessed entry, with a porch treatment and decorative elements consistent with the architectural style of the home.



This massive entryway appears to be two stories tall.

5B. Materials and Color

- 5B1. Utilize colors, which occur naturally in the landscape of the site. Darker or natural colors blend better with the surroundings.

- 5B2. A mixture of materials can create interest and detail. Wood and stone can help soften the appearance of stucco and blend it with the natural setting.



The exterior of this house utilizes wood and stone materials.

- 5B3. Texture and well-designed detail added to wall surfaces distract from large wall area and minimize their perceived impact.

- 5B4. To decrease the perception of mass, two story walls should integrate details into the facades or use a combination of one and two story elements.



This building utilizes different exterior materials to break up the perception of mass.

5C. Roofs

5C1. Careful design of a roof can mitigate visual impact by reducing the appearance of bulk and mass.



✓ The roof lines of this house break up the mass.



✗ The roof lines and roof pitch of this house emphasize its mass.

5C2. The basic form or shape and the pitch of the roof should follow the principles of an architectural style.



Prairie Style



Mansard Style



Neo French Eclectic Style



Neo Tudor Style

5C3. Hip roofs with deep overhangs help transition a house into a site.



This house utilizes a hip roof with deep overhangs.

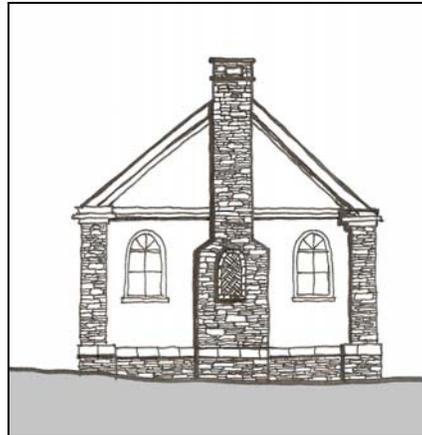
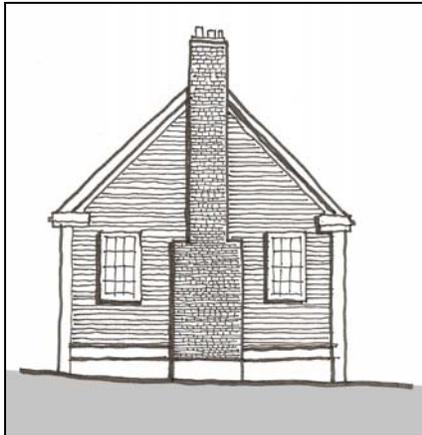
5D. Chimneys

- 5D1. Chimneys should be designed to reflect the architectural style of the structure and be appropriate in scale with the structure.



The chimney on this Spanish style home reflects the architectural style and is not incompatible in height and size.

- 5D2. Chimneys should use materials and detailing compatible to those found on the structure.



Both these examples show chimneys that are compatible with other materials and detailing on the building. Brick chimneys are common and work with many exterior materials.

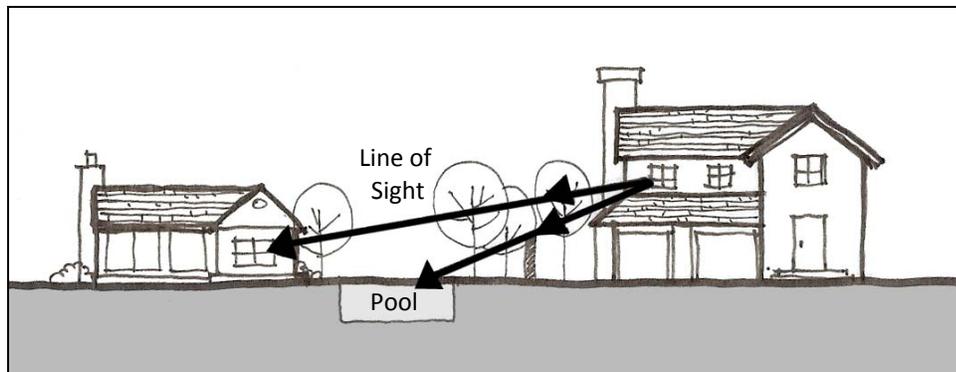
5D3. For remodels and additions, new chimneys should match the scale, design and materials of any existing structure.

5D4. Spark arresters should be architecturally compatible with the structure.

6. Landscaping

6A. Relationship to the Building

- 6A1. Landscape elements should augment the relationship between the building and its site.
- 6A2. Landscaping should be designed to protect the privacy of the neighbors and homeowners.



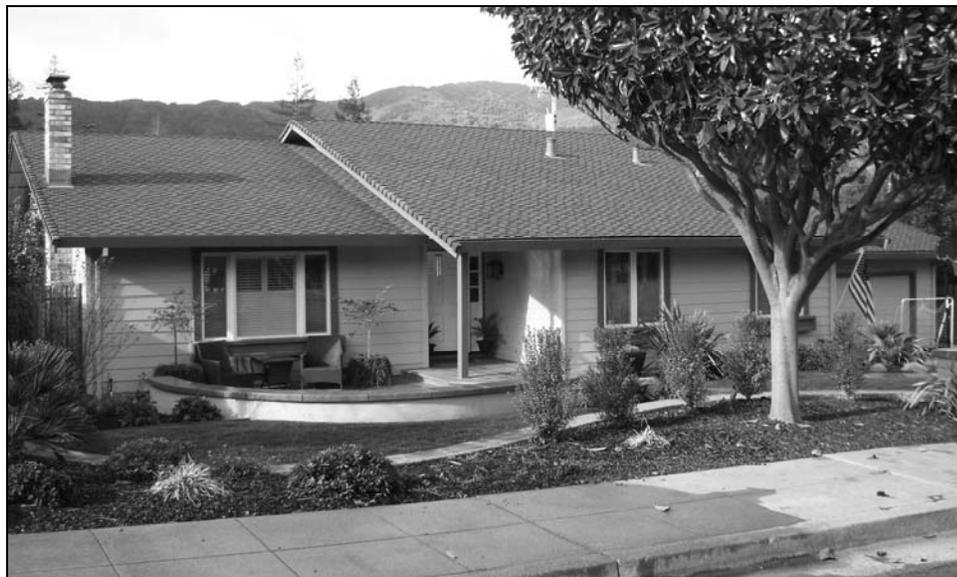
Planting trees between neighboring properties will block the line of sight from neighboring homes and protect the privacy of homeowners.

6A3. Create landscape buffers between neighboring properties.



These properties have substantial landscape buffers between them.

6A4. Landscaping should help define the boundaries between the private outdoor space and the more public, or street-facing, outdoor space.



The landscaping is delineated between the private lawn and the public street.

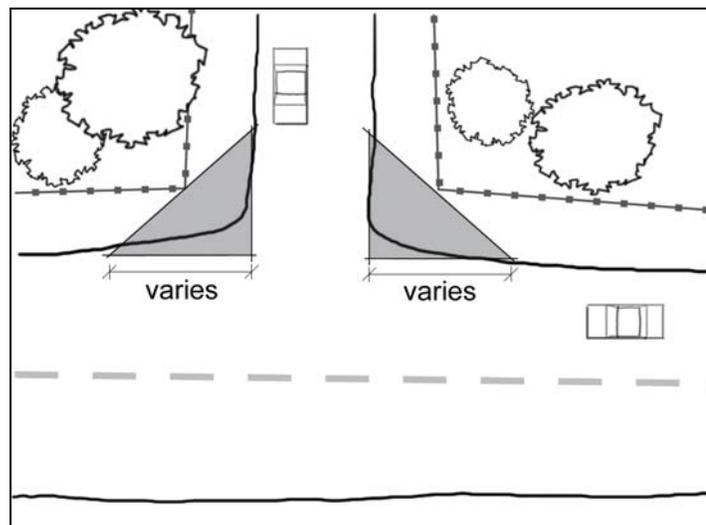
6B. Roads and Driveways should be Integrated into the Natural Landscape

- 6B1. Driveways and walkways should complement the home while maximizing the amount of landscaping and minimizing the amount of paving.
- Paving materials for driveways should be consistent with the architectural style of the home and incorporate its accent elements. Paving materials should also complement the existing landscape and link the hardscape with the primary structure.



- To minimize extensive use of concrete, driveways are encouraged to incorporate natural materials into their design with the use of brick pavers, stone, decomposed granite or turf block.

- c. Place roads and driveways on existing contours to minimize grading. Driveways should have a slope less than 15%.
- d. Sharing driveways with neighbors may be mutually beneficial, especially on long hillside slopes.
- e. Adequate visibility and sight distance must be provided where the driveway meets the road.



✓ The shaded triangles show the area that should not be blocked, in order to provide adequate visibility and sight distance for drivers.

- f. Drainage and frontage improvements should be compatible with the neighborhood and sensitive to the rural character of the City.

6C. Water Conservation

- 6C1. The City historically has been concerned with water conservation. Trees and shrubs should be selected that are suitable for this climatic zone. The use of drought tolerant, fire-resistant and deer-resistant plants is strongly encouraged. Please see the City for a list of preferred plant species.

6D. Fencing and Walls

- 6D1. Minimize the use of fencing to allow the natural landforms to flow together.
- 6D2. Solid fencing and stucco walls are discouraged.



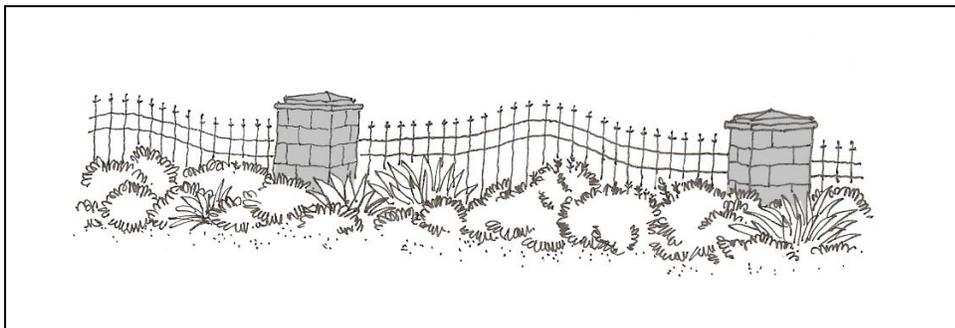
An open fence in the front yard invites views.



X A solid stucco wall blocks off the view of the building and gives a harsh appearance.

6D3. Build fences of non-reflective materials and use natural or dark colors. Natural materials should be used when possible.

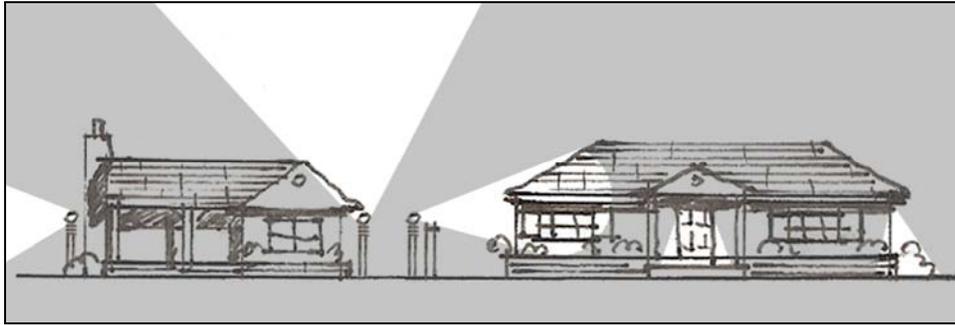
6D4. Landscaping should be installed along fences to soften the appearance of the fence material and provide a layering of vegetation in front of the fence.



6D5. Automobile gates as well as pedestrian entry gates should reflect the design of the home and contribute to an overall improvement of the property.

6E. Lighting

- 6E1. Exterior lights should be carefully placed. Exterior lighting should not be directed toward the street, the sky or neighboring parcels.



X The lights on this house create too much glare.

✓ The lights on this house are appropriately directed.

- 6E2. No lights are allowed on tennis or sport courts.

- 6E3. Light sources shall not be visible from off site.

7. Multi-Family Design Guidelines

Monte Sereno recognizes the need to provide a range of housing types to meet the changing needs of the community. The Multi-family design guidelines are intended to reinforce the Monte Sereno Design Guidelines by defining site and architectural expectations for development at higher densities than the City has historically accommodated.

Goals

- Goal 1** Harmoniously balanced development with the physical setting i.e., natural resources protected, hazardous area undeveloped and critical public open spaces preserved.
- Goal 2** Preservation and protection of environmental resources which protect the high quality of life in Monte Sereno.
- Goal 3** Preservation of the natural topography and integrity of the creeks, streams and natural drainage within the city.
- Goal 4** Maintain the high level of neighborhood character and pride.
- Goal 5** Maintain existing suburban and semi-rural character in Monte Sereno.
- Goal 6** Encourage energy conserving practices in the maintenance of existing and new structures.

Principles

7A. Neighborhood Compatibility

The key to a successful residential project in Monte Sereno is to assure its compatibility with the surrounding homes in the neighborhood.

- 7A1. The character the neighborhood should determine the design of the buildings and their placement on the site. Ultimately, the landscaping will be the finishing touch that will blend the buildings with the surroundings.
- 7A2. A building's mass, roof form and projecting elements should be designed so as to minimize the visual impact on the neighborhood. Rooflines shall be designed in ways that minimize interference with views from neighboring properties.

7A3. Buildings and trees should be designed and sited so as to minimize the obstruction of key views from adjacent properties.

7B. Site Compatibility

The existing topographical terrain and established tree cover and plant life contribute greatly to Monte Sereno's distinctive rural character.

7B1. The buildings' architectural style, visual bulk, massiveness, height, width and length shall be compatible with the neighborhood and harmonize with the existing residential structures of neighboring properties.

7B2. Open space and landscape areas should visually blend with adjacent properties and be consistent with the neighborhood and sensitive to the rural character of the City.

7B3. Buildings should be orientated so that outdoor space will visually connect between properties and extend a sense of open space, while maintaining a sense of privacy.

7B3. The building's mass, roof form and projecting elements shall be designed so as to minimize the visual impact of the building on the slope and on views of the elevated oak woodland and hills from Highway 9.

7B4. Private open space such as patios, gardens, recreation courts and play areas shall be placed in a manner to maximize use of sun and shade patterns, natural drainage and existing trees and vegetation.

7B5. Integrate the buildings and landscaping with the surrounding environment and terrain. Retain the rural countryside feeling and openness of the City's setting. The surrounding natural environment should dominate the visual character of the site.

7B6. The site shall be designed to be compatible with the terrain and blend it into the surroundings. Measures to ensure compatibility may include development with the contours of the land, avoidance of excessive grading, and stepping structures downslope utilizing one story elements.

7B7. Buildings shall be designed to be compatible with the natural slope of the land, adapting to the land and reflecting its contours, while preserving all significant, existing trees and vegetation and any other natural site attributes.

7B8. Building setbacks and design shall be established that preserve views of the elevated oak woodland and hills from Highway 9 and landscaping adjacent to the highway.



Figure 1 - The footprint, mass and size of multi-family homes should be compatible with surrounding vegetation and structures.



Figure 2 - Example of cluster homes showing abundant landscaping, shared spaces and courtyards.

7C. Physical Design Components

Design structures to have a similar mass and scale to the neighborhood. Provide architectural elements including but not limited to, building details, materials and roof treatments to mitigate significant visual impacts.



Figure 3 - Multi-family homes should have architectural elements, including but not limited to, building details, materials and roof treatments to break up mass.

- 7C1. Use architectural details to break up mass. The use of eaves, bay windows, small windows, varying elevations and alcoves reduce the appearance of bulk and are encouraged.
- 7C2. Porches: A porch is a transitional space on the building façade between the external and internal environments of the home. It is a semi-private space that is essentially outdoors yet offers shelter from the elements. Porches are primarily of two forms. They are either inset into the primary mass of a building or built outside the main building as a separate volume that helps mediate the building mass consistent with the building’s architectural style.
- 7C3. Eaves: Eaves are a critical component of the junction between the wall plane and the roof plane. Detailing of the eaves should be consistent with the architectural style of the building.
- 7C4. Windows and Doors: The following are guidelines for appropriate front entry treatment:
- i. Smaller entries help create a more human scale to a home and are strongly encouraged.
 - ii. Recessed entries can create an elegant, intimate feel while adding human scale to a home and are encouraged.
 - iii. Front entry doors and decorative elements such as moldings, columns, posts, lighting and build-in benches and planters should be architecturally consistent with the style of the home.
 - iv. One-story roofs or overhangs that serve as porches, appropriate to the architectural style, are strongly encouraged.
 - v. Large, massive entries that appear two-story are discouraged.
 - vi. Single door entries are encouraged.
- 7C5. Utilize colors, which occur naturally in the landscape of the site. Darker or natural colors blend better with the surroundings.
- 7C6. Texture and well-designed detail added to wall surfaces distract from large wall area and minimize their perceived impact.

7C7. To decrease the perception of mass, two story walls should integrate details into the facades or use a combination of one and two story elements.

7C8. Careful design of a roof can mitigate visual impact by reducing the appearance of bulk and mass.

7D. Landscaping

Provide extensive landscaping in both public and private open space areas. Carefully place lighting fixtures to limit impacts to surrounding residences. Preserve and protect public views.



Figure 4 - Extensive landscaping in both public and private spaces is encouraged.

7D1. Landscape elements should augment the relationship between the buildings and the site.

7D2. Landscaping should be designed to protect the privacy of the neighbors and home owners.

7D3. Create landscape buffers between neighboring properties.

- 7D4. Driveways and walkways should complement the buildings while maximizing the amount of landscaping and minimizing the amount of paving.
- 7D5. The City historically has been concerned with water conservation. Trees and shrubs should be selected that are suitable for this climatic zone. The use of drought tolerant, fire-resistant and deer-resistant plants is strongly encouraged. Please see the City for a list of preferred plant species.
- 7D6. Minimize the use of fencing to allow the natural landforms to flow together.
- 7D7. Solid fencing and stucco walls are discouraged.
- 7D8. Build fences of non-reflective materials and use natural or dark colors. Natural materials should be used when possible.
- 7D9. Landscaping should be installed along fences to soften the appearance of the fence material and provide a layering of vegetation in front of the fence.
- 7D10. Automobile gates as well as pedestrian entry gates should reflect the design of the building and contribute to an overall improvement of the property.
- 7D11. Exterior lighting shall not be directed toward the street, the sky or neighboring parcels.
- 7D12. Tennis and sport courts may not be illuminated.
- 7D13. Light sources shall not be visible from off site.

For more information

Go to the City website: www.cityofmontesereno.org

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