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## INTRODUCTION

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# 01 INTRODUCTION

## A. OVERVIEW

Santa Cruz County is one of the most unique places in California. The stunning natural environment hosts spectacular views and rich natural and open space resources that make this place cherished by residents and visitors alike. The dynamic changes in natural context have led to the development of communities that vary dramatically in character, ranging from coastal communities to Redwood forest enclaves and everything in between - each with their own history reflective of stories of past industry and ways of life.

As Santa Cruz County's communities continue to grow and change, it is critical that they do so in a way that aligns with the existing character that defines each unique context and continues to elevate design and foster healthy environments for inhabitants. Identifying design solutions that work for many natural and urban environments is a challenge. However, tailored design guidelines that rely on the fundamentals of community development, building form and scale, receptiveness to neighborhood character, and integration of sustainability, will guide future development and redevelopment and create new opportunities for housing, economic development and activity.

## B. PURPOSE AND ORGANIZATION

The Santa Cruz County Design Guidelines are crafted to ensure that development projects are attractive, functional, context-sensitive, and in alignment with community goals and objectives. The guidelines support the County's sustainability goals and contribute toward building functional and livable communities. These guidelines are designed to work



in tandem with development standards and other regulatory documents to construct a complete framework to ensure that new projects fit with the built and natural character of sites throughout the County. The guidelines offer illustrative examples of how new projects should be built or remodeled to best fit overarching objectives while still offering developers, architects, designers and property owners the flexibility to be creative in their projects. Alignment with the design guidelines is crucial in streamlining the review process and ensuring that project designs complement or enhance the community's vision.

The guidelines are organized into chapters based on project development type. The chapters are as follows:

**Ch 2. Overarching Design Guidelines.** These guidelines can be applied to all project types and provide design guidance for elements including site planning, building design, open space, multi-modal access and parking, community character and neighborhood transitions, landscaping, sustainable design, and utilities and trash enclosures..

**Ch 3. Multifamily Residential Design Guidelines.** Multifamily Residential projects can have a wide range of configurations and typologies. Guidelines

are provided for both small infill projects that are placed in an existing neighborhood, and larger-scale multifamily projects situated along transit-rich corridors. Particular guidelines are provided to prioritize scale and livability in the high-density “residential flex” multifamily zone district.

**Ch 4. Commercial Design Guidelines.** Both new and repurposed/retrofitted commercial development are addressed in this chapter, with special considerations for infill development strategies and organization of commercial uses within buildings.

**Ch 5. Mixed-Use Design Guidelines.** Mixed-use development is an efficient and effective pattern that combines residential and commercial development. The guidelines address the complexities of designing multiple uses on one site. Design strategies for both vertical and horizontal mixed-use typologies are outlined.

**Ch 6. Workplace Flex Design Guidelines.** The Workplace Flex zone district allows a mix of light industrial, office, and retail uses within one parcel. The guidelines establish criteria to facilitate innovative and context-sensitive development of projects in this zone district.

## C. STREET TYPOLOGIES

These guidelines take into account the conditions and character of street typologies associated with different roadways in Santa Cruz County. The County has adopted a layered network approach to roadway classifications that incorporates multimodal planning. A balanced transportation system is based on the understanding that it is difficult for a single roadway to meet the demands and expectations of all modes simultaneously. A “layered” transportation network envisions streets as systems based on user types (pedestrians, cyclists, transit riders, drivers).. In this approach, certain user types are prioritized

on specific streets. When compiled together the roadway system is then comprised of multiple networks of street types such that different users are traveling using different networks. This layering approach allows for each user type to have a higher quality experience as compared to an approach that attempts to accommodate all users on all streets.

Street typologies include:

**Multimodal Corridors.** Primary corridors for transit, cyclists, pedestrians, and vehicles. Accessibility and mobility are prioritized, with wide sidewalks, buffered bike lanes, and frequent transit service. Community-serving commercial, mixed-use, and high-density multifamily residential land uses are appropriate.

**Active Connectors.** Corridors providing high-quality pedestrian and bicycle facilities that emphasize first and last mile connections to major land use destinations and transit. Residential and neighborhood-serving commercial and mixed-use land uses are appropriate.

**Main Streets.** Walkable commercial streets that cultivate an intimate and vibrant streetscape and create destination spaces that facilitate activity and social interaction. Commercial and mixed-use land uses are appropriate, with connection to neighborhoods.

**Local Residential Streets.** Low-speed streets connecting residential neighborhoods with commercial service areas, catering to pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles.

**Rural Connectors.** Long-distance connectors between rural neighborhoods and agricultural areas. Primarily used by vehicles and cyclists.

**Mountain-Agriculture Streets.** Local streets outside urban service boundaries.

In these guidelines, considerations for street frontage design are provided within the context of the street

typologies where development is expected to occur. Buildings should be designed to accommodate street zones to ensure safe and efficient travel and enhance the public realm. Street zones include the vehicle travel zone, bicycle zone, parking zone, pedestrian amenity zone, pedestrian sidewalk zone, and activity zone. Street zone requirements are different for Multimodal Corridors, Active Connectors, Main Streets, and Local Residential Streets. Specific guidelines are not provided for Rural Connectors or Mountain-Agricultural Streets, since the guidelines are focused on development in the urban area. For more information see Appendix A.

## D. DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR SPECIFIC AREAS

Design guidelines for the Pleasure Point Commercial Corridor are provided as Appendix B to these design guidelines. Design guidelines for other specific geographic areas are provided in village, town, and community plans under separate cover, such as the Aptos Village Plan. To determine whether any specific geographic area design guidelines apply to a given parcel, consult Chapter 2 of the General Plan, as well as the County's online mapping application (<https://gis.santacruzcounty.us/gisweb/>).

## E. HOW TO USE THE GUIDELINES

The Santa Cruz County Design Guidelines should be used in conjunction with the Santa Cruz County General Plan, County Code, and Design Criteria for streets and frontages. The guidelines provide ideas and best practices for well-designed projects, whereas the General Plan, County Code, and Design Criteria set land use requirements and quantitative development standards that projects are legally required to follow. In cases where design guidelines are related to specific quantitative requirements, links to the relevant standards are provided.

Chapter 13.11 of the County Code identifies which project types are subject to the Santa Cruz County Design Guidelines. Projects that are not required to follow the Design Guidelines are still encouraged to follow applicable provisions in Chapter 2: Overarching Design Guidelines.

**Project types with specific guidelines that are provided in Chapters 3 - 6 (multifamily, commercial, mixed-use, and workplace flex) should follow both the Overarching Design Guidelines and those specific guidelines.**

**Projects located within geographic areas with specific design guidelines should follow those guidelines as well as applicable portions of the Santa Cruz County Design Guidelines.**

In some cases, specific guidelines serve to provide more detailed direction for topics addressed in the Overarching Guidelines, and in other cases they provide guidelines for topics that are unique to certain development types or geographic areas. The guidelines provided for the Pleasure Point Commercial Corridor identify exactly which sections of the Santa Cruz County Design Guidelines should be followed for projects in that area (see Appendix B, Guiding Design Principles for the Pleasure Point Commercial Corridor).

**In any case where there is a conflict between the Overarching Design Guidelines and guidelines for specific project types, the specific project type guidelines shall take precedence. Guidelines for specific geographic areas take precedence over all other design guidelines.**

Project applicants should also learn the street typology for the street where their project will be located, make note of any design guidelines that particularly apply to that street typology, and review street zone standards related to that street typology as provided in Appendix A.

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