



# 03

## MULTI FAMILY RESIDENTIAL

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## 03 MULTIFAMILY RESIDENTIAL

### PURPOSE AND APPLICABILITY

The following design guidelines are intended to inform the scale, character and features of multifamily residential projects in Santa Cruz County. Multifamily residential projects include a variety of building typologies, ranging from small-scale duplexes, triplexes, and quadplexes that resemble large single family homes, to larger townhome projects, apartment buildings and condominiums.

These guidelines apply to all multifamily residential projects, although some guidelines are specifically oriented toward smaller or larger projects. The guidelines provide ideas and best practices for well-designed projects, and should be used in conjunction with the County's General Plan, County Code, and Design Criteria for streets and frontages. In cases where design guidelines are related to quantitative

requirements, links to relevant standards are provided.

Specific development standards and appropriate design guidelines for multifamily projects may depend on the street type, zone district, and General Plan land use designation of the parcel where the project is located. For instance, the "Residential Flex" zone district allows higher housing density, more lot coverage, and less open space compared to other multifamily districts and is most appropriate in areas with a mix of larger-scale existing development and connection to transit, such as Multimodal Corridors.

**Multifamily residential projects should follow both Chapter 2: Overarching Design Guidelines and the guidelines provided in this chapter.**

### MULTIFAMILY DESIGN GOALS

- 1 Provide livable and functional multifamily housing that is affordable to residents of a variety of income levels.
- 2 Cultivate inviting frontage conditions and activate the streetscape and provide natural surveillance ("eyes on the street") while also serving ground floor residential units.
- 3 Allow creativity and flexibility in architectural form and design that accommodates high-density housing while respecting the scale, style and character of the local context.
- 4 Provide well-designed open space and other housing amenities that meet the needs of a diverse mix of residents.
- 5 Provide sensitive transitions between residential and commercial properties.
- 6 Plan and design efficient pedestrian and vehicular access layouts that prioritize direct pedestrian connections to the street and encourage residents to walk, bike, and take transit.

## A. SITE PLANNING

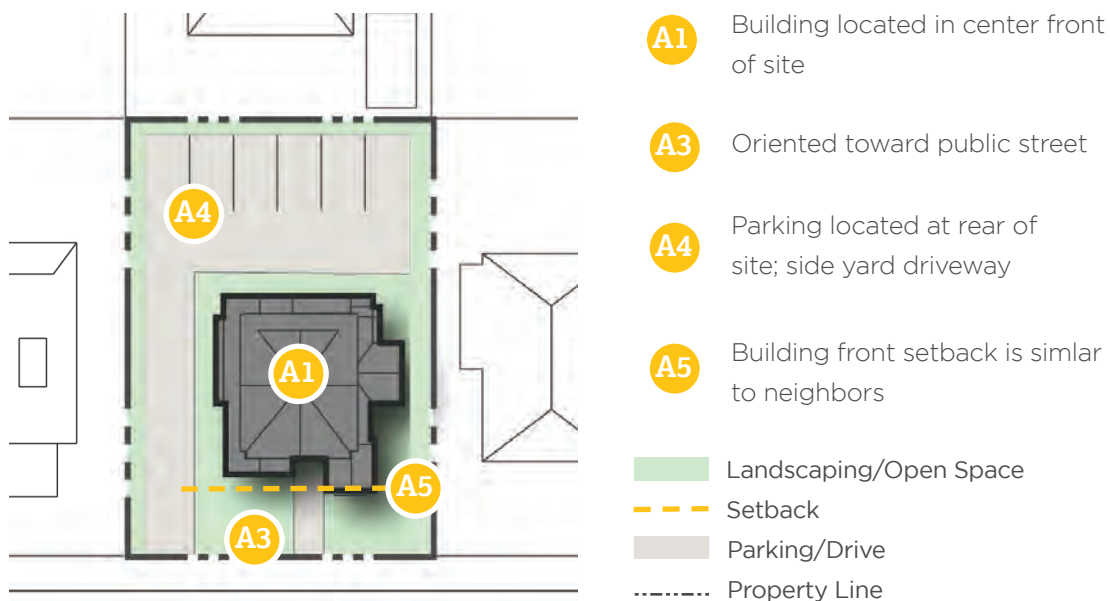
**A1. Building Placement - Neighborhoods.** Within residential neighborhoods, locate multifamily buildings in the center front of the site, especially if other buildings in the neighborhood follow this pattern. Locate front yards along public streets to assist in cultivating a sense of community and neighborhood feel.

**A2. Building Placement - Corridors.** Along Multimodal and Active Corridors, place buildings along the edge of frontages with adequate space to accommodate a front yard area between the building face and the edge of the fronting streetscape.

**A3. Building Orientation.** Orient buildings towards public streets with the primary entrance to housing units on the ground floor directly accessible from an adjacent sidewalk. Internally-facing buildings with primary entrances oriented toward a common space should prioritize the pedestrian experience. Primary building facades and entrances should not face parking areas when the option to face the street is available.

**A4. Parking Location.** When feasible, locate parking at the center or rear of the site, improving street frontages and minimizing views of parking areas from public streets. For sites adjoining other residential properties, locate access driveways at the side of the site where feasible to act as a buffer.

*See County Design Criteria and SCCC 13.16 for parking design requirements.*



### SMALL-SCALE MULTIFAMILY

## A. SITE PLANNING

**A5. Front Yard Setbacks.** Along streets where walking and streetscape activity is encouraged, site multifamily buildings close to the street to connect the development with the streetscape. A greater setback distance may be appropriate to create a common open space or enhanced front yards to enrich the streetscape.

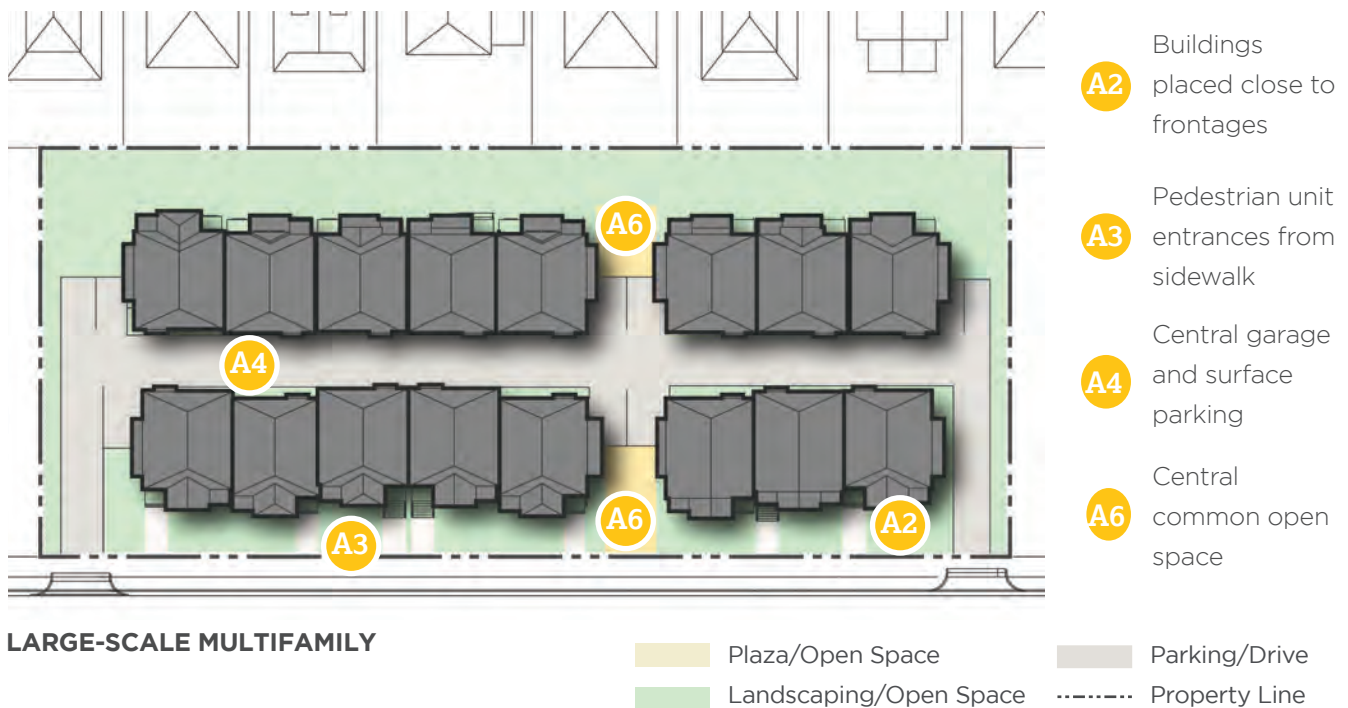
Along Local Residential Streets and in residential neighborhoods, assess setback distances of adjacent residential properties and site buildings to complement the existing pattern of front yard depth.

Along Multimodal Corridors, multifamily buildings may be placed further back from the street to buffer living areas from noise, privacy and emissions impacts.

*See SCCC 13.10.323(C) for residential setback requirements and SCCC 13.10.323(F)(7) for front yard averaging requirements.*

**A6. Open Space.** Locate common open space areas in front and side yard areas when possible. On larger sites with multiple structures or along Multimodal Corridors, explore centrally-located common open spaces. See Section C: Open Space for more guidance on common and private open space design.

*See SCCC 13.10.323(D) for residential open space requirements.*



## B. BUILDING DESIGN



**B1. Building Mass.** Encourage highest building height and mass to be located near the center of the site and building footprint. Building mass should taper from the center of the site toward the property lines to emulate the scale and style of single-family residential development and allow for solar access to open spaces, especially within neighborhoods.

Design upper floor mass to complement neighborhood scale by incorporating design elements such as upper floor stepbacks and gable and hip roof forms.

*See SCCC 13.10.323(C) for third floor stepback requirements.*

**B2. Wall Plane Variation.** To add visual interest, consider offsets of at least one (1) foot in depth to differentiate building units and emulate surrounding development patterns.

**B3. Setback Variation.** On larger projects, consider utilizing fluctuating setbacks approximately every 25 to 35 feet or the width of one housing unit to create a rhythm along the street edge.

**B4. Roofline Variation.** Consider utilizing changing roof heights, roof slope angles and dormers to create variation in the roofline and building height profile and further enhance visual interest.

- B1** Building mass concentrated in middle of building
- B2** Varied wall planes
- B4** Roof pitches and dormers fit neighborhood

## B. BUILDING DESIGN



- B1** Gable roofs de-emphasize upper floor building mass
- B2** Varying wall planes accentuate individual units
- B3** Setback variation
- B4** Roofline and height changes

## B. BUILDING DESIGN

**B5. Building Step-Backs.** Upper floor building mass should be stepped back along internal frontages to provide solar access to common open spaces, internal drives, and other on-site spaces.

Upper-floor setbacks along frontages should be incorporated along Local Residential Streets.

*See SCCC 13.10.323(C) for third floor setback requirements.*

**B6. Building Modulation.** Create variation in building mass along building faces to diminish the sense of bulk, and provide more interest and depth to building form.

Building modulation to balance bulk and mass is especially important within the Residential Flex (RF) zone district where buildings may take up a larger percentage of the lot area compared to other residential zone districts.

**B7. Facade Articulation.** Provide an array of facade treatments such as trim, awnings, bay windows, balconies, and other architectural elements to create variation along the building face.

**B8. Facade Design.** Utilize a harmonious palette of materials and color to add visual interest.





## B. BUILDING DESIGN

**B9. Materials Modulation.** Emphasize modulating and articulating building elements through material changes to create more visual interest.

**B10. Design Consistency.** Select compatible and high-quality building and landscape materials that harmonize with the overall project design, landscaping, and neighboring structures. On larger projects, ensure design continuity throughout the project through similar architectural styles, materials, colors, and other treatments.

*See SCCC 13.11.070(D) for landscape design requirements, including requirements for front yards, plant species, tree planting and removal, site furniture and fixtures, and buffering and screening.*

**B11. Frontage Design.** Locate the front door to housing in a visible location from the adjacent streetscape. Entrances that front Multimodal Corridors should be designed to create distance and differentiation from the streetscape. This may be achieved through landscaping, wider front yards, fencing, and/or elevated stoops.



## B. BUILDING DESIGN

**B12. Windows.** Place ground floor and upper floor windows and openings along exposed edges of the building face with particular attention to buildings fronting public streets. Additionally, locate balconies, raised decks, patios and other outdoor private open space elements along highly visible frontages. This encourages doors and windows to open onto the public street and provides eyes on the street.



## C. OPEN SPACE

**C1. Private Open Space.** On sites zoned Residential Multifamily (RM), provide 60 square feet of private open space for every unit. Site buildings to accommodate stoops and porches along ground floor unit entrances, including internal-facing front yards. On sites zoned Residential Flex (RF), higher density development may not allow for private open space for every unit. Wherever private open space is provided for multifamily projects, the minimum dimension should be six feet in order to ensure that the space is usable.

**C2. Common Open Space.** On sites zoned RM, provide 200 square feet of common open space per unit. On sites zoned RF, provide at least 15% of gross site area as private or common open space.

Locate common open space areas in front and side yard areas when possible. On larger sites with multiple structures or along Multimodal Corridors, explore centrally-located common open spaces, such as plazas, that are interconnected with a network of pedestrian paths to individual private open spaces. Wherever common open space is provided, the minimum dimension should be 15-20 feet to ensure that the space is usable.

*See SCCC 13.10.323(D) for usable open space requirements.*



## C. OPEN SPACE

### C3. Private/Common Open Space

**Interface.** Consider locating private open spaces for individual housing units next to common open spaces. Where possible, connect different open spaces with elements such as strolling paths to foster a sense of community.

**C4. Amenities.** Install chairs, tables, trellises and other shade features to create outdoor social areas in common spaces that serve as internal gathering spots.

**C5. Front Yards.** Design front yards and front setback areas to accommodate residential amenities, passive recreational activity, trees and landscaping.

Within front setback areas along Local Residential Streets and in residential neighborhoods, create a front yard environment that offers common open space for residents and complements the front yard use patterns in the neighborhood to help build community.

Along Multimodal Corridors and Active Connectors, use front yard areas to screen residential units, and consider locating common open space in interior areas such as courtyards to provide a more restful space for residents.

*See SCCC 13.11.070(D) for front yard landscape design requirements.*



## C. OPEN SPACE



**C6. Res Flex sites.** On sites zoned RF, front yard setbacks and open space areas may be smaller compared to other multifamily sites in order to accommodate larger buildings and more residential units. On these sites, include common open space areas whenever feasible, especially on sites with more than 10 units. Consider providing common open space as one large area to enhance usability and a sense of community, in a location that is visible and easily accessed by all units, and accessible to users of all ages and physical abilities.



**C7. Play Element Amenities.** On large sites, consider installing on-site play features to support active and passive recreation needs for people of all ages and abilities and encourage a family-friendly community.



**C8. Gardens.** Explore community gardens to serve the needs of the development and neighborhood residents.

## D. ACCESS, CIRCULATION AND PARKING

**D1. Curb Cuts.** Limit curb cuts for vehicular access to a maximum of one per frontage and up to three for developments with more than two frontages. Curb cuts should not exceed the minimum width required. Driveways should be designed so that sidewalks remain ADA compliant as they cross driveways.

*See County Design Criteria for curb cut requirements.*

**D2. Resident Parking.** Encourage garage parking as the preferred covered residential parking option. On larger projects, encourage podium parking if feasible.

**D3. Guest Parking.** Consolidate and locate surface parking for guests, if required, at several locations throughout the project site, to reduce the visual impact of large swaths of parking.



## D. ACCESS, CIRCULATION AND PARKING



**D4. Efficient Parking.** Encourage space-efficient parking options such as shared driveways, tandem parking, stacked parking, valet parking and parking garages to maximize space for building and open spaces..

**D5. Access Drives.** Locate vehicular access driveways at the periphery of the site. Design drives to visually accommodate two-way vehicular circulation on large sites. Consider creating shared driveways between adjoining properties.

*See SCCC 13.16 and County Design Criteria for access driveway, vehicular parking and pedestrian path design requirements.*



**D6. Pedestrian Paths.** Construct distinguishable pedestrian paths for residents and guests. Pedestrian paths should utilize different materials, colors and textures from the vehicular driveway, and ideally should be separated from the driveway. For large projects, design at least one mid-block pedestrian connection along each frontage with a clear and well-designed pedestrian path.

**D7. Unit Access.** When applicable, install high-quality exterior staircases accessing upper-floor units that match the aesthetics and materials of the building.

**D8. Unit Entrances.** For all street-facing ground floor residential units, consider providing a visible entrance that directly connects to the sidewalk to create a pleasant streetscape environment.



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