

# Design Guidelines Issues Part 1

**Introduction** – The Design Guidelines booklet is a rule book for unresolved design issues that will be used by the San Diego City Planning Department to evaluate plans submitted by New Urban West or another builder for the new developments being built on the CMR Golf Course. As you would expect, the rules which use "shall" are firm, while those using "should" or "wherever possible" may or may not to be followed.

## ***The SCR process, and why the Design Guidelines are critical to CMR***

**What is the SCR process?** Under a "Substantial Conformance Review" (SCR) a Planning Department Staff Member decides if the plans submitted by the developer comply with the appropriate code, document, or permit. There are two versions – Process 1 where Community Planning Group is only notified as a courtesy, and Process 2 where their response is required before approval. NUW is asking for a Process 1 review when they submit final plans for a building permit.

**An SCR happens after the entire project has been approved by the City Council,** following votes by the Community Council and Planning Commission. It's effectiveness is based on the premise that the builder will follow the letter and intent of the Design Guidelines, and that only minor changes will be requested by city planning staff. *Find more info from the City of San Diego here:* <https://www.sandiego.gov/department-document/substantial-conformance-review-scr>

**Why is this important?** The Design Guidelines have always stated that New Urban West planned to use Process One (Planning Dept. Staff only) Substantial Conformance Reviews on some final implementation details. **NUW may not be planning to submit actual drawings for the buildings and their parking areas until after the project is approved.** This means that comments about the Design Guidelines may be our only way to influence building design and other important site-planning decisions!

**Read this Design Guidelines** paragraph to see which documents will be used to evaluate the plans submitted with the building permit once actual construction begins:

### **Section 1-D. Implementation, Page 5, of the**

The Trails at Carmel Mt Ranch - Project No. 652519 Design Guidelines (11 MB)

[https://apps.sandiego.gov/directories/development-services/docs/CMR\\_DesignGuidelines\\_04-14-2020\\_.pdf](https://apps.sandiego.gov/directories/development-services/docs/CMR_DesignGuidelines_04-14-2020_.pdf)

**Send comments about the Design Guidelines**, including the proposal to use the SCR Process 1 for final approval to:

Jeffrey Peterson, Development Project Manager

City of San Diego, Development Services Department

Email address: [JAPeterson@sandiego.gov](mailto:JAPeterson@sandiego.gov)

Subject line: Trails at Carmel Mountain Ranch Project No. 652519

## Design Guidelines Issues Part 2

### ***Buffers between existing homes and new buildings***

**Will buffers be smaller than expected?** A lack of clarity about construction plans may mean that the final project will not be what many people are expecting. The New Urban West communications to the public and the City have been marketing messages, interspersed with factual statements and commitments, which makes the project very difficult to understand.

**Guidelines vs. Rules** – There are descriptive paragraphs and illustrations which should be understood to be guidelines and conceptual examples. There are also rules, which usually include the word "shall". In the Substantial Conformance Review process, the San Diego City Planning Department staff member should only be expected to insist on compliance with the rules. (These may not be the exact terms used by the City, but the meaning is similar)

#### **This is a rule:**

In **Design Guidelines Chapter 3** (Site Design and Planning) **Section 3-A**

"Development Standards" includes this supplemental standard:

"1. New buildings shall be set back from existing homes with a 50-foot setback buffer zone (see Section 3-F and figures 11 and 12)."

#### **This is not a rule:**

In **Design Guidelines Chapter 2** (*Guiding Principles of Design*) **Section 2-C** "Provide Transitions & Screening with Landscaped Buffers" describes buffers:

"A minimum 50-foot setback buffer zone between the property lines of the existing homes and new development provides ample space for trails, landscape, and robust screening."

#### **This is not a rule:**

In **Design Guidelines Chapter 3** (Site Design and Planning) **Section 3-F** "Transitions, Buffers, Edges & Screening " includes this guideline:

"16. A minimum 15-foot landscaped area (trees, shrubs and groundcover) should be provided at the exterior perimeter of the 50-foot buffer along existing residences that abut the new development (see figure 11). "

**Figures and Illustrations** – Many of the pictures provided are either stock photos or drawn illustrations that show best possible cases of the concepts they describe.

Figure 11 – Design Guidelines Page 14 – The caption says "A 50-foot buffer provides ample space for multiple rows of landscaping, trees and paths" The buffer area shows planted landscaping only. It does not show the buildings allowed to be just beyond the buffer area, or the trails, carports, recycle bins, parking areas, or roads. Elsewhere in the guidelines it states that any of those items could be present. (See "The Fine Print" below)

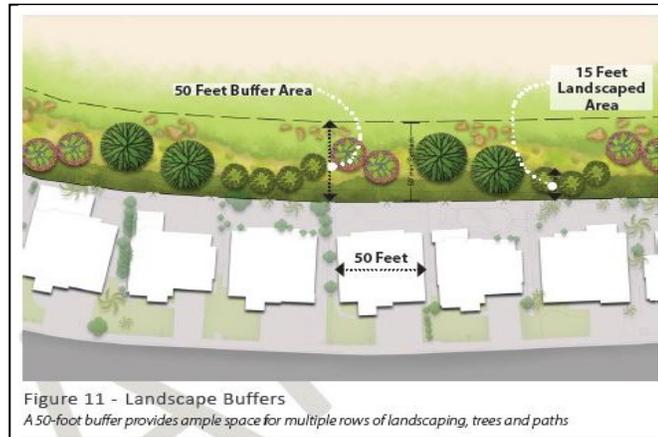


Figure 12 – Design Guidelines Page 14 – This picture does show the buildings just beyond the buffer area, but there are still none of the paths, roads, or parking areas that are likely to be present. The Landscape Plans (Complete Plan Set sheets 43 through 56) show more details of the buffer area planting and most units have at least one area with less than 10' of actual landscaping shown. This suggests that hardscape such as driveways or parking spaces may be planned for those areas.

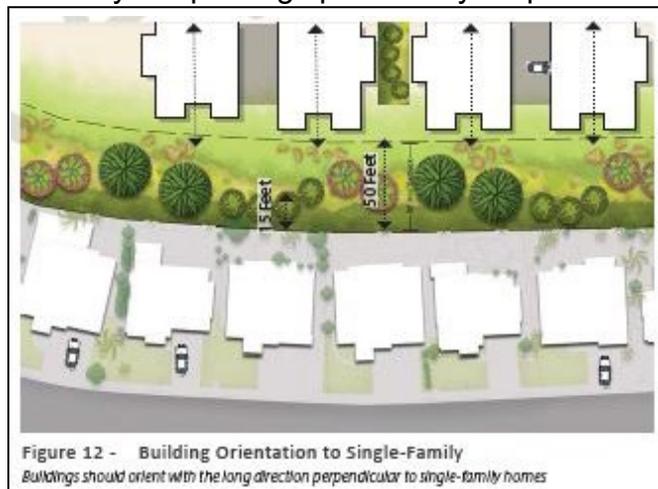


Figure 13 – Design Guidelines Page 15 – This set of pictures are illustrations for design guidelines 18, 19, and 20 on page 14. The captions are good guidelines for the subject they address, but the drawings continue the NUW marketing effort to reinforce an image of 50-foot or larger heavily landscaped setback buffers. Possible changes that would improve the realism of these cross-sections:

- 48-foot 4-story buildings
- Flat-roof buildings (see Design Guidelines page 21)
- Buildings at the inner edge of the 50-foot buffer
- 20 or 30 feet of driveways or parking in the 50-foot buffer
- Carports with solar cells over the parking areas
- Any of the other allowed uses of the 50-foot setback buffer

Throughout the Design Guidelines document there are pictures and descriptions that are accurate unless examined in the larger context of how this project will impact the existing Carmel Mountain Ranch community.



Figure 13 - Landscaped Buffers & Screening

**The Fine Print – Any surprises?** There are details and rules in the Design Guidelines that more exactly define what can be done in the Buffer Areas. (underlines added)

**Design Guidelines Chapter 3** (Site Design and Planning Standards) **Section 3-A** contains this description of **AR-1-1 Zone** limits & exceptions:

"In order to implement a 50-foot buffer at all units where residential development is proposed, the AR-1-1 zone is retained. Other undeveloped areas retain the AR-1-1 zone to protect open space and provide parks or recreational amenities. No inhabitable structures are permitted within this 50-foot AR-1-1 zone with the exception of the following allowable projections: awnings, eaves, trellises, porches, garden walls not exceeding 6 feet in height, retaining walls, fencing, carports, solar panels, utility boxes, lighting, signage, and accessory structures, such as refuse and recycling storage may encroach into the 50-foot setback area and AR-1-1 zone and consistent with base zone requirements."

Note that "consistent with base zone requirements" likely means that beyond the list of items listed here, there are many things the base zone AR-1-1 may allow, and would be permitted – roads, driveways, paths, recreational improvements etc.

**Design Guidelines Chapter 3** (Site Design and Planning Standards) **Section 3-F**

"Transitions, Buffers, Edges & Screening" lists some specific rules:

13. New buildings shall be set back from existing homes with a 50-foot setback buffer zone (see figures 11 and 12).

14. The 50-foot buffer zone may include open space and landscaped areas and slopes.
15. Circulation elements, such as drive aisles, driveways, parking areas, paths and trails may encroach into the buffer area for a maximum of 35% of the gross buffer lot area of each unit.
16. A minimum 15-foot landscaped area (trees, shrubs and groundcover) should be provided at the exterior perimeter of the 50-foot buffer along existing residences that abut the new development (see figure 11).
17. Wherever possible, buildings are encouraged to be oriented with the long dimension of the building perpendicular to existing homes (see figure 12).
18. Architectural articulation (such as offsetting building planes, changes in materials, porches, stoops, balconies, bay windows and other elements) should be used to provide visual relief from new buildings facing existing residential units.
19. Transition zones between existing homes and new development should include landscape screening to provide visual relief (see figure 13).
20. Wherever possible, windows into living spaces are encouraged to be oriented away from the existing residences and toward internal courts, paseos and open spaces of the development (see figure 13).
21. New development is encouraged to take advantage of existing topography, especially in areas where new buildings may be sited at a lower grade elevation than the existing homes (see figure 13).

Watch the words "shall" and "should" – of the guidelines listed above, only #13 (the 50-foot setback for buildings) is required – all other landscaping and design items are optional.

### **Why is this important?**

The 2nd version of the Design Guidelines (4/14/2020) has reduced the percent of **gross buffer area per Unit** to 35% (from 50%) but because they are using a % of all the buffer space in a Unit (hole), this still allows them to use much of the 50 feet for parking and roads in areas next to the buildings as long as they offset it elsewhere in that Unit. It is not clear that even the "minimum 15-foot landscaped area" is protected.

This issue is critical to reducing the impact on homes immediately adjacent to the new apartment and townhome structures! Comments and emails to the San Diego Planning Department may help change these limits to more solid rules.

### **Download Documents:**

The Trails at Carmel Mt Ranch - Project No. 652519 Design Guidelines (11 MB)

[https://apps.sandiego.gov/directories/development-services/docs/CMR\\_DesignGuidelines\\_04-14-2020\\_.pdf](https://apps.sandiego.gov/directories/development-services/docs/CMR_DesignGuidelines_04-14-2020_.pdf)

The Trails at Carmel Mt Ranch - Project No. 652519 Complete Set of Plans (95 MB)

[https://apps.sandiego.gov/directories/development-services/docs/CMR\\_Complete\\_Set\\_of\\_Plans\\_20200413.pdf](https://apps.sandiego.gov/directories/development-services/docs/CMR_Complete_Set_of_Plans_20200413.pdf)

### **Send Comments:**

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