



City of Laguna Beach

Community Development
Department

INFORMATIONAL GUIDE FOR THE:

DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS

Intent

In 1972, the City of Laguna Beach established a design review process for new construction or revitalization of existing structures. This information guide provides an overview of the design review process and sets forth general guidelines. For more specific information, you are encouraged to consult the following official documents that are available for review at City Hall:

1. City GIS Database
2. Zoning Map
3. Laguna Beach Municipal Code • Title 25 – Zoning
4. City's General Plan Elements, Specific Plans & Resource Documents
5. Design Guidelines
6. California Building Code

You are encouraged to contact the Community Development Department for further information about any points contained in this information guide or any applicable codes. Since the ordinances of the City of Laguna Beach are based to a large extent on community values and needs, they continually change and therefore require periodic review. You may also log onto the City's website at www.lagunabeachcity.net to access the City's Municipal Code and the City's Geographic Information System (GIS) which includes environmental constraint maps.

The Process

The codes, criteria and parameters affecting your project may be numerous and complex, because of the unique identity, topography and aesthetic qualities of Laguna Beach. Prior to the preparation of your construction plans, it is imperative that you thoroughly investigate all applicable ordinances and policies, which may affect your development. Your project will most likely require discretionary approval(s) prior to submittal of your structural drawings. Professional guidance may be necessary to assist you in achieving your goals.

Certain projects require the applicant to obtain a site development review meeting with a City Planner prior to the submittal of a formal development application. The goal of this process is to provide the applicant a preliminary evaluation of the project's development potential in relation to the City's regulations, guidelines and community and neighborhood standards as generally applied by the Design Review Board, as early as possible in the project's design stage. (Please refer to the Applicant's Guide for Zoning Review and Pre-Application Site Review.)

Certain areas of the City have specific design issues, unique to those particular areas. Reviewing applicable Specific Plans and contacting neighborhood organizations will be of assistance in identifying the appropriate design regulations and guidelines for your project.

Samples of projects subject to Design Review Board approval include:

1. New single family dwellings
2. Second floor additions
3. Additions in excess of 15 feet above grade
4. Additions that exceed 50% of the original floor area (includes prior additions)
5. Decks more than three feet above the ground
6. Grading in excess of 20 cubic yards outside the building footprint
7. New construction or additions to multi-family, commercial or industrial properties

8. Demolition, modification or additions to historically significant structures
9. Modifications or additions to projects previously approved by the Design Review Board

The submittal requirements for Zoning Division review and the Design Review process are available from the Department of Community Development.

In addition to preliminary design plans that conform to minimum submittal requirements the requirements may include:

1. A site survey
2. Panoramic views of the project along with neighboring structures
3. Colored elevations
4. A model (especially in the case of commercial projects)
5. A color and materials board
6. Site photos
7. Viewshed analysis
8. Landscape plans
9. Preliminary grading and drainage plans
10. Review of geologic/hydraulic and other environmental conditions
11. Certified staking plan (Please refer to the Information Guide to Staking a Design Review Project.)
12. Noticing requirements
13. Variance application

The Design Review Board/Board of Adjustment

The Design Review Board/Board of Adjustment consists of five Board members appointed by the City Council for a period of two years. The Board usually meets on the second and fourth Thursday evenings of the month, in the City Council Chambers.

The responsibilities of the Board are to review designs and to consider applications for variance and coastal development permits. In each case, the Board members familiarize themselves with the applications and the property under discussion prior to the meeting through submitted plans and site visitations. The applicant, their representatives (i.e. architect or contractor), interested neighbors and concerned citizens are all given an opportunity to address the Board on the proposal during a noticed public hearing.

Familiarize yourself with the Board and its procedures. It may be helpful to attend one or more Design Review Board meetings in preparation for your submittal.

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

1. Zoning Ordinance

Each project should be designed to comply with the required height limits, setbacks, additional building setbacks, area limitations, open space requirements, parking and any additional requirements specific to the zone, which may be imposed. Unique physical features on a site may create additional restrictions, including those identified on the City's GIS database.

2. Adjacent Property Owners and Neighborhood Associations

Consideration should be given to a project's functional and aesthetic aspects while maintaining compatibility with existing development in the immediate area. The City Council and Design Review Board expect each applicant to contact neighbors who may be affected by proposed projects before plans are submitted to the City. Such early, informal communication with neighbors may resolve potential conflicts and expedite the Design Review process.

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3. The Structure

The size, scale, mass, color, materials and relationship of your structure to adjacent properties are important considerations in designing your project.

The following definitions may be helpful:

Size: The physical makeup of your project in terms of width, depth, height, volume and floor area.

Scale: The overall appearance of your project as it relates to the total pattern of the skyline and neighborhood. The creation of visual harmony and transition between new and existing structure should also be considered when determining an appropriate scale.

Mass: A building's volume. A structure which may be too "massive" is one which has no relief or façade articulation; structures lacking a gradual transition from the streetscape to the building should be avoided.

Neighborhood Character: New development should be compatible with the existing development in the neighborhood and respectful of neighborhood character. Neighborhood character is the sum of the qualities that distinguish areas within the City, including historical patterns of development (e.g. structural heights, mass, scale or size), landscaping themes and architectural styles.

4. View Preservation

The City's geography creates unique ocean and canyon views from many sites and areas. As a result, the preservation of views from adjacent properties is an important consideration in designing your project. It may be helpful to prepare a viewshed analysis demonstrating how public and private adjacent views were considered in the design. Design Review guidelines attempt to balance the preservation of views with your right to develop your property.

5. Grading

Grading has both technical and aesthetic aspects. While some grading is often necessary to prepare sites and ensure proper drainage, a proposed development should strive to preserve and enhance the natural environment and any existing aesthetic qualities of the site. Since geological considerations may be crucial to your project, careful review of the site's geology is mandatory.

The following considerations should be observed when grading is involved in the design:

- a. Grading should result a minimal disturbance of natural terrain and vegetation.
- b. Grading should not result in the soil erosion, slide damage or drainage problems to either the project site or adjacent property. Continuity with surrounding properties should be considered.
- c. High, steep banks should be avoided. A smooth flow of landforms should be retained.
- d. Projects designed to follow natural slopes will minimize grading. Split-level, hillside developments will reduce high cut or fill banks. Steep slopes are difficult to landscape and maintain.
- e. Utilize outdoor space where possible by incorporating decks in the design rather than creating large retaining walls and artificial yard areas.

6. Landscape

The following general guidelines are intended to achieve a unified and attractive landscape design. The City's Landscape and Scenic Highways resource document provides specific neighborhood recommendations.

- a. The design should be compatible with the shape and topography of the area and the architecture of the project.
- b. Site-specific environmental factors should be considered in the development of the design.
- c. Provide a balanced mix of trees, shrubs and groundcover. A proper mix of plants will result in landscape plantings with complimentary leaf texture, design, water/sun requirements and color. The appropriate plant materials should be checked against the particular climatic and hardiness zones of the area to assure a successful landscape plan.
- d. Use plants creatively to soften building lines, to emphasize the positive features of the site and to screen parking areas, trash storage, loading docks, utility boxes, etc.
- e. Coordinate landscaping with adjacent private or public landscaping where appropriate.
- f. Nonliving landscape ground material such as gravel, bark or paving should be used when appropriate and in harmony with the overall design composition. Percolation should be maximized and impermeable surface areas minimized.
- g. Street trees may be required in addition to on-site landscaping. All specimen trees must conform to the standards of the nursery industry for size and quality.
- h. To ensure the longevity of your plants, an automatic irrigation system should be installed and a regular maintenance schedule followed.
- i. Long-term growth characteristics of trees should be considered with respect to view preservation.
- j. For reasons of geologic/soils stability, the use of drought resistant plants should be considered on hillsides.
- k. Landscaping adjacent to open space should be compatible with native habitat.
- l. In commercial projects, the size and quality of landscaping to be installed should be such that upon occupancy a mature and established appearance is presented.

7. Lighting

Lighting quality is a critical aspect of the character of a project. Just as each project must present a unique and distinct identity during the day; it must be equally represented at night. Lighting should enhance the architecture of a project, be functional and non-offensive to adjacent properties. Exterior lighting should be minimized and shielded.



RESIDENTIAL GUIDELINES CHECKLIST

The following checklist was created to provide you with an easy way to ensure that your project complies with the Residential Design Guidelines.

RESIDENTIAL DESIGN GUIDELINES

COMPLIES

Yes / No

Chapter 3 ACCESS		Y	N
3.1	Design safe and adequate site access		
3.2	Minimize paved parking areas		
3.3	Locate access points to minimize disruption of pedestrian circulation in neighborhoods with sidewalks		
3.4	Ensure adequate site visibility over vehicular traffic and pedestrian safety.		
3.5	Follow the City’s engineering standards (See Municipal Code Title 21)		
3.6	Improve pedestrian circulation by providing sidewalks and public trails where appropriate		
CHAPTER 4 DESIGN ARTICULATION		Y	N
4.1	Step a retaining wall to follow the natural topography		
4.2	Minimize visible retaining wall height.		
4.3	Use materials that complement the natural setting and help walls blend into their surroundings.		
4.4	Plant trees, shrubs or vines to soften the appearance of a retaining wall		
4.5	Give as much design consideration to outdoor areas as to indoor areas, considering existing development and neighboring properties.		
4.6	Divide a large building mass into smaller modules.		
4.7	Use building volumes efficiently.		
4.8	Step a building with the site slope		
4.9	Use articulation techniques that are consistent with the architectural style of the residence (CH. 5)		
4.10	Choose appropriate roof forms.		
4.11	Vary wall plane lengths and wall heights.		
4.12	Design a roof to follow site contours		
4.13	Use architectural elements and details to provide variation in building form and help achieve an appropriate scale.		
4.14	Design windows and doors in a manner that enhances building articulation.		
4.15	Articulate building form through variation in materials, color and/or texture.		
4.16	Locate the garage to minimize its impact on the perceived mass of the building.		

4.17	Consider alternative garage configurations to reduce the perceived mass of the building.		
CHAPTER 5 DESIGN INTEGRITY		Y	N
5.1	Building forms, materials and details should be integrated in character and style.		
5.2	Building form should be consistent with the chosen architectural theme and overall design concept.		
5.3	A building should be distinctive but also contribute to the character of the neighborhood.		
5.4	Select distinctive architectural details that are consistent with the chosen architectural style.		
5.5	Use architectural details to provide a sense of scale and interest.		
5.6	Determine whether a deck is appropriate, assessing its impact on views, privacy, light and shade (Chs 12 and 15).		
5.7	Minimize the impacts of a deck or balcony.		
5.8	Use building materials in a consistent manner.		
5.9	Design an accessory structure to be consistent with the primary structure and site features.		
5.10	Design an attached garage to be an integral element of the architectural composition of the building.		
Chapter 6 ENVIRONMENTAL CONTEXT		Y	N
6.1	Minimize alteration to the site's significant environmental features.		
6.2	Maintain natural slopes to the extent feasible.		
6.3	Avoid building on the crest of knolls, ridgelines and prominent locations.		
6.4	Consider the location of trees and their root systems on and near the site when determining the building footprint.		
6.5	Minimize grading.		
6.6	Create smooth transitions in grade between buildings and between adjacent properties and natural grades.		
Chapter 7 GENERAL PLAN COMPLIANCE		Y	N
7.1	Create a design that satisfies the letter and the intent of the General Plan, any applicable Specific Plan and the certified Local Coastal Program.		
Chapter 8 HISTORIC PRESERVATION		Y	N
8.1	Preserve historic architectural features and details.		
8.2	Repair rather than replace architectural details whenever possible.		
8.3	When restoration is not an option, replace historic features in-kind.		

8.4	Preserve primary historic building materials to the extent feasible.		
8.5	Repair rather than replace original materials that have deteriorated over time whenever possible		
8.6	When repair is not an option, replace original building materials in-kind.		
8.7	Preserve a porch in its original form.		
8.8	Replace a missing porch with one similar to that seen historically.		
8.9	Preserve the historic window size, shape style/operation (bay, bow, single-hung, double-hung, casement, fixed, picture, transom, clerestory, etc.), design (divided lights, mullions, stained glass, etc.), and on a primary façade arrangement.		
8.10	Carefully repair a deteriorated window or door rather than replacing it or completely closing the opening.		
8.11	Replace a window or door that is damaged beyond repair with one that reflects the historic character of the residence.		
8.12	In adding new window or door openings on a character-defining façade, keep them consistent with the historic structure's architectural style.		
8.13	Preserve historic garages.		
8.14	Preserve historic landscape and streetscape features.		
8.15	Preserve the original roof form and scale.		
8.16	Use roof materials in a manner similar to that seen historically.		
8.17	Relocate a historic structure only when this is the only viable option for preservation.		

Chapter 9	LANDSCAPING	Y	N
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9.1	Preserve significant trees and other mature vegetation.		
9.2	Use plant materials that thrive in the natural setting.		
9.3	Design with view equity in mind.		
9.4	Consider visual contributions to street and neighborhood.		
9.5	Use planting to soften, integrate or otherwise enhance the building in its setting.		
9.6	Choose and locate plants for fire safety		
9.7	Be aware of site geotechnical and erosion issues.		
9.8	Consider hardscape elements that complement the design.		
9.9	Locate outdoor use areas to avoid unreasonable impact to neighbors.		

9.10	Design with consideration for proper management of stormwater and irrigation.		
9.11	Design planting and irrigation systems to conserve water.		
9.12	Design planting and irrigation systems to conserve water quality.		
9.13	Engineer site drainage to retain water on-site.		
9.14	Locate utility elements or mechanical equipment to minimize visual and noise impacts.		
9.15	Minimize glare and light trespass onto other properties.		

Chapter 10 LIGHTING AND GLARE		Y	N
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10.1	Minimize glare.		
10.2	Minimize visual impacts of exterior lighting.		
10.3	Prevent light trespass.		

Chapter 11 NEIGHBORHOOD COMPATIBILITY		Y	N
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11.1	Prior to beginning design, make a thorough reconnaissance of the area surrounding the site, noting the particular characteristics that make the neighborhood special.		
11.2	Check to see if the site is important to public views or visible from areas outside of the immediate neighborhood.		
11.3	Contact affected neighbors early to receive input about neighborhood values and issues.		
11.4	Design a unique building that reflects the best qualities of the surrounding neighborhood.		
11.5	Design additions to and around historic structures to complement the character of the structure.		
11.6	Design a structure with a footprint that maintains the pattern of open space existing in the neighborhood.		
11.7	Locate the structure on the site to maintain the neighborhood pattern of open space location.		
11.8	Design new development in such a way that visible mass conforms to the scale of the neighborhood.		
11.9	Maintain building heights that are appropriate to the neighborhood.		
11.10	Consider the existing setback pattern in the neighborhood.		
11.11	Maintain the predominant spacing pattern of side yards.		
11.12	Avoid long, uninterrupted wall planes and provide open space.		
11.13	Incorporate landscaping into required setback areas.		
11.14	Choose planting that complements the scale and height of the landscaping in the neighborhood and avoid sharp variations in vegetation types between properties.		

11.15	Design hardscape to complement the neighborhood's character and scale.		
11.16	Locate garages and driveways in a manner compatible with the established neighborhood pattern.		
11.17	Design garages to preserve the existing scale of the neighborhood.		

Chapter 12 PRIVACY		Y	N
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12.1	Site a building with maximum consideration for privacy issues.		
12.2	Consider the floor plans of the subject property and adjacent residences.		
12.3	Give thoughtful consideration to the siting and design of outdoor spaces.		
12.4	Design landscape to mitigate noise and privacy impacts.		

Chapter 13 PUBLIC ART		Y	N
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13.1	Locate public art to be visible from the street or other significant public right-of-way.		
13.2	Use materials that will be resistant to vandalism, theft and weather and facilitate maintenance.		

Chapter 14 SUSTAINABILITY		Y	N
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14.1	Select materials with relatively low levels of embodied energy.		
14.2	Select building materials that will withstand local environmental conditions.		
14.3	Incorporate passive solar orientation and design.		
14.4	Capture natural daylight.		
14.5	Use natural cooling techniques in place of air conditioning.		
14.6	Install cool roof systems or green roofs.		
14.7	Maximize the use of energy-efficient products and systems.		
14.8	Minimize visual impacts of solar or wind devices as seen from the public right-of-way and adjacent properties.		
14.9	Maintain solar access for neighboring properties.		
14.10	Design the site with consideration for stormwater management.		
14.11	Minimize the use of irrigation water, pesticides and fertilizer.		
14.12	Make all new fireplaces gas-burning rather than wood-burning.		
14.13	Use EPA-approved fireplace insert retrofits for existing wood-burning fireplaces.		
14.14	Consider converting wood-burning fireplaces to gas.		
14.15	Consult the Community Development or Fire Departments for current regulations pertaining to		

	outdoor fire-pits/fireplaces especially if located within a fuel-modification designated area.		
14.16	Select building materials containing low levels of volatile organic compounds (VOCs).		
Chapter 15 SWIMMING POOLS, SPAS AND WATER FEATURES		Y	N
15.1	Design pools and spas to relate closely to the topography of the site.		
15.2	Minimize acoustic impacts of water features on other properties.		
15.3	Screen pools, spas and water features from adjacent properties.		
Chapter 16 VIEW EQUITY		Y	N
16.1	Locate and design new buildings or site development to facilitate view equity, anticipating future views from neighboring potential development and to vacant or undeveloped land.		
16.2	Avoid blocking neighbors' primary views.		
16.3	Organize buildings to maximize views.		
16.4	Minimize mass to maintain neighborhood views.		
16.5	Design landscaping to maintain views.		
16.6	Maintain view corridors when feasible.		
16.7	Design balconies and decks to balance view interests.		



City of Laguna Beach

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INFORMATIONAL GUIDE FOR:

How to Participate in the DESIGN REVIEW BOARD Process as a Neighbor

IMPORTANT! Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the City has modified its procedures for conducting site visits. If you have concerns about the effects this proposed project could have on your property, you may schedule a site visit in accordance with the guidelines identified in the attached document. If you wish for a site visit to be conducted, then sign the Agreement for Site Visit form and return it to the City Staff identified on the public hearing notice. Once we have received the form, City Staff will notify the Design Review Board (DRB) members to contact you to schedule the site visit that will occur no earlier than the Friday before the scheduled hearing. During the site visit, you must abide by all the applicable guidelines provided by the City. Property owners not wanting site visits may consider other methods, such as photos and videos via email, FaceTime, Zoom, etc. Staff may work with you on this option to ensure that photographic and video footage objectively represents the project issues. Do not conduct unauthorized and/or unscheduled site visits.

Familiarize Yourself with the Project:

Public Notices are mailed out several weeks prior to a scheduled design review hearing. The public notices include the hearing date, project location and description, a contact person for questions related to the proposed project, and some basic procedural information.

In addition to mailed written notices, project sites are usually required to be 'staked' with story poles and ribbons several weeks before the hearing to provide a visual representation of proposed building improvements. The proposed plans are available through links to the meeting agenda on the City's website, available for review at the Community Development Department if City Hall is reopened to the public and will include a staking plan identifying what each story pole is intended to represent.

Neighbors are encouraged to contact the applicant or City staff/project planner with any questions or concerns they may have related to a proposed project. The name and phone number of the appropriate contact person is included on the public hearing notice. Our goal is to encourage all interested parties to work together to resolve concerns prior to the initial design review hearing, whenever possible. Neighbors and applicants are equally responsible for working towards a positive outcome.

The proposed project plans are linked online to the Design Review Board meeting agenda. City staff members are available via email or telephone to assist you with reading and understanding the plans.

Link: <http://www.lagunabeachcity.net/cityhall/citygov/cityclerk/mam.htm>.

Prior to the Hearing

The City requires that applicants take reasonable steps to contact neighbors prior to scheduling a design review hearing date to resolve potential issues before the initial hearing. **The applicant should make a good faith effort to contact neighbors by telephone, email, or other means to satisfy and document the early communication requirements and is not required to meet in person.** If you have concerns about a project, you are encouraged to let the applicant know as early as possible so that the applicant is given an opportunity to address those concerns.

How Projects are Evaluated:

Design Review projects are approved or denied based on sixteen (16) specific criteria. These criteria are described in Municipal Code Section 25.05.040(H) and include the following:

Access

Design Articulation

Design Integrity

Environmental Context

General Plan Compliance

Historic Preservation

Landscaping

Lighting and Glare

Neighborhood Compatibility

Pedestrian Orientation

Privacy

Public Art

Sign Quality

Sustainability

Swimming Pools, Spas and Water Features

View Equity

Neighbor comments and concerns related to a proposed project should be centered on these criteria to be appropriately considered by the approval authority.

In addition to discussing the project with the applicant, you may submit comments in writing. Comment letters should be submitted to the City as early as possible. Submitting letters near or on the day of the hearing makes it difficult for the approval authority to effectively evaluate your comments. If you would like copies of your letter to be distributed to all approval authority members, please provide seven copies for distribution. Single copies will be placed in the property file for general review.

The attached Site Visit Guidelines have been developed to respond to the COVID-19 situation and includes an Agreement for Site Visit form to allow Design Review Board members to visit properties to visualize concerns.

Submitting Written Comments

You may submit comments on any agenda item or on any item not on the agenda in writing via mail to the Zoning Administrator at: 505 Forest Avenue, Laguna Beach, CA. 92651 or by email to rbunim@lagunabeachcity.net. Please email your comments to the Zoning Administrator no later than 3 p.m. the day before the DRB meeting in order for your comments to be submitted to the DRB members prior the meeting, which provides them sufficient time to review the comments.

Testifying at the Hearing

At the Design Review *hearing*, neighbors may testify in support of a project or express their concerns via teleconferencing. Use the following Zoom link, <https://lagunabeachcity.zoom.us/j/96967550268>, and click on the raise hand button to comment on an item. When called on, please unmute yourself by clicking on the unmute button on the bottom left portion of the screen. If you do not have a device to access the meeting or are experiencing internet connection issues, call **(669) 900-9128** and type in the **Webinar ID, 96967550268#**. Let City staff know you want to comment on an item that is being discussed by pressing *9 using the keypad on your phone. When you hear, "the host would like you to unmute your microphone," please press *6 to unmute yourself and proceed with your comment. Speaking time is limited, so it is advisable to plan your comments ahead of time. Having notes on hand to stay on topic is helpful. Expressing your comments or concerns within the framework of the design review criteria will help the approval authority appropriately consider your concerns in their deliberations and decision-making.

Appeals

If you reside within 300 feet of the subject property and disagree with a decision of the approval authority, you may appeal the decision to the City Council. Appeal forms may be obtained from the Office of the City Clerk and must be filed within 14 calendar days of the decision along with a required appeal fee.

The City Council will hear the appeal at a noticed public hearing. The appeal hearing is limited to the grounds specifically identified on the appeal form. The City Council would conduct a 'de novo' hearing (a new review of the project in its entirety) if the decision was supported by less than four affirmative votes. Otherwise, it is presumed that the approval authority acted reasonably and correctly. Any party filing an appeal has the burden of providing evidence to the contrary.