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DESIGN GUIDELINES  
*Building*



# 4 Building

In order to make townhouse construction more feasible, the Small Lot Ordinance minimizes the required sizes of side, rear, and front yards. As a result, small lots are ultimately shaped by building configuration. Designers should consider how the arrangement of interior space affects exterior massing and how the configuration of building elements respond to adjacent buildings. Design strategies incorporating neighborhood context include considerations of: building height transitions, arrangement of buildings and open space, landscape elements, vehicular driveways and pedestrian paths, and architectural details and scaling devices that breakdown the massing of the development.

With reduced setback requirements and small lot areas, providing access to air, light, and ventilation is more challenging for small lot developments than typical single-family designs. Thus, architects and builders must take full advantage of the unique design opportunities presented to them to create livable environments.

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**Objective:** Develop the overall form and relationship of the buildings by focusing on neighborhood compatibility and high-quality design of the following elements: entry, height and massing, building facade, roof lines, and materials.

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Sensitive window and balcony placement in the Rock Row development are key to enhancing the light and ventilation of the home's interior.



The Buzz Court development demonstrates how the front unit of the development is designed to engage the public street and sidewalk.



Entryways, porches and stoops clearly delineate public and private realms while maintaining a comfortable relationship between these realms and their users.



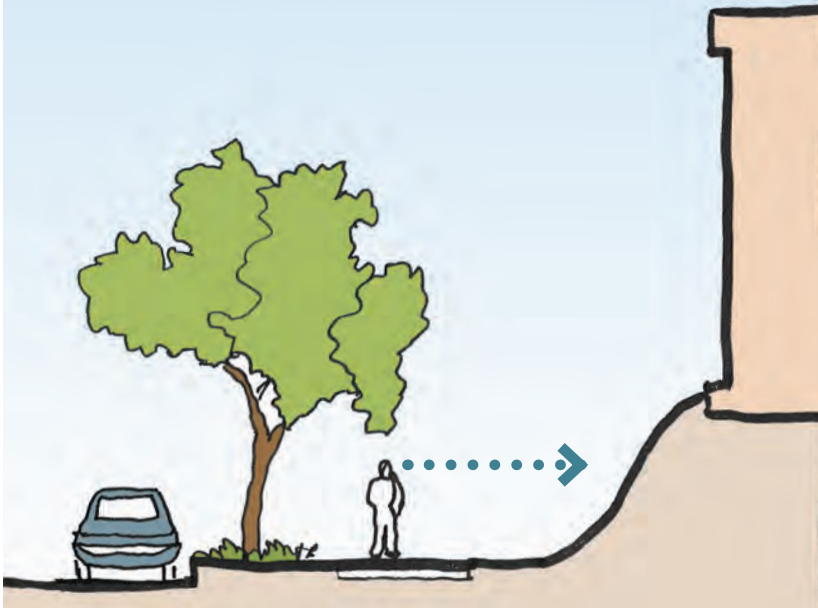
These home entrances sit a few steps above the sidewalk. A small landscaped area provides a buffer between the sidewalk and building edge.

## ENTRY GUIDELINES

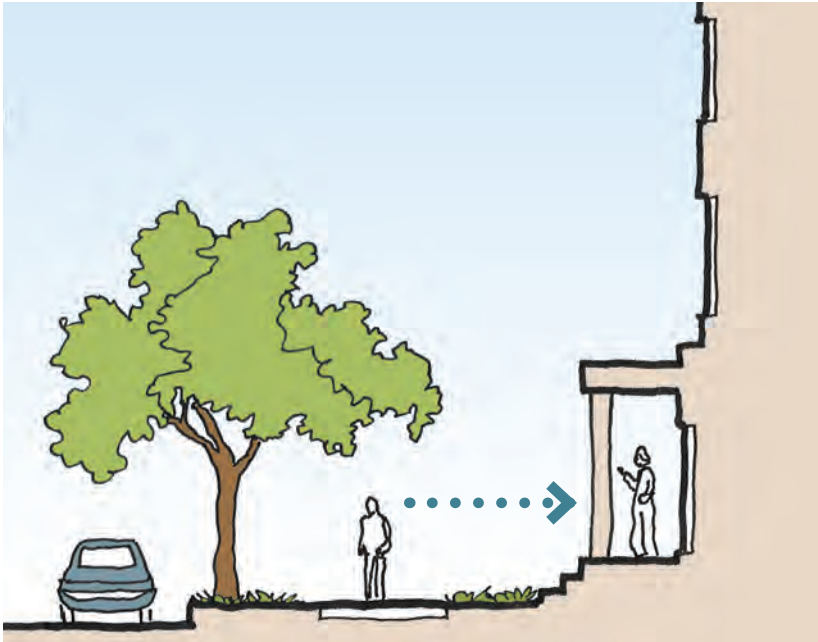
When entries are well articulated and easy to find, they function as gateways— simultaneously welcoming visitors, allowing for seasonal decorations, and clearly delineating the boundaries of the private realm. They may also offer habitable outdoor space in the form of a small front porch or patio.

- 1 Primary entryways should be clearly identifiable and connected to the public street by a walkway. Individual residences should incorporate transitions such as landscaping, paving, porches, stoops, and canopies.
- 2 Homes that front a public street should have their primary entryway accessible from the street. Garages should not take the place of the main entryway.
- 3 Entryways should sit at a grade comparable to those of the surrounding structures, and should never tower above the street.
- 4 Use ornamental low-level lighting to highlight and provide security for pedestrian paths and entrances. Ensure all parking areas and walkways are illuminated.
- 5 Sole entrances should be at grade level. Homes with multiple entrances may include a secondary entrance at three to five steps above grade or consistent with the average grade of existing structures.
- 6 Entrances that front commercial boulevards should allow room for a stoop and entryway and ideally some landscaped area.
- 7 Ground-floor commercial arrangements fronting on the street in a commercial district do not require a separation between the entry and the street. See Special Guidelines for Ground-Floor Commercial Uses (p. 28) for further information.
- 8 Incorporate transitions such as landscaping, paving material, porches, stoops, and canopies at the primary entrance to each residence, and at the main pedestrian entrance to the development from the sidewalk.

ENTRY (CONTINUED)



Small lot homes with excessive grading tend to tower awkwardly above the neighborhood and sidewalk. This creates a physical and visual barrier between the public and private realms.



A better interaction between a small lot development and the street is achieved when buildings are only a few steps above street level. This creates a clear sight line between the sidewalk and the front entry.

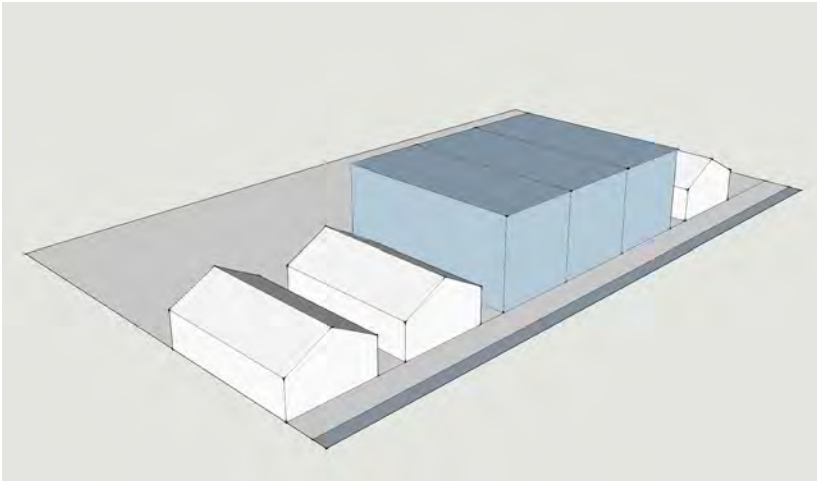


Varied building heights and massing creates a more interesting and walkable streetfront.

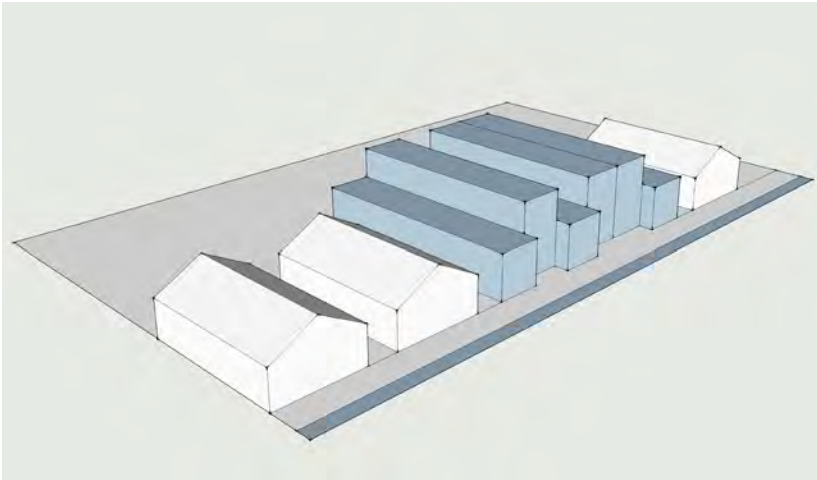
## HEIGHT AND MASSING GUIDELINES

While building height is often criticized for a project's incompatibility with the neighborhood, it is more often the building's massing--the overall volume of the building--that can cause the new structure to seem out of context. Well-designed buildings do not "max out" the allowable building massing permitted by the code --height limits, yard, setbacks--but employ variations in height, massing, rhythm, and texture to reduce the perceivable massing of the building. These variations serve dual functions: they help small developments mesh with their surroundings, while also enhancing the overall quality of the street by providing visual interest and a pedestrian scale.

- 1 Use the surrounding built environment to inform decisions about variations in height and massing.
- 2 Avoid excessive differences in height between the proposed development and adjacent buildings.
- 3 Provide sufficient space between buildings, articulation along the street frontage, and visual breaks to diminish the scale and massing.
- 4 Small lot developments should be appropriately designed and scaled to transition from single-family properties using methods such as step backs, building placement, driveway location, variations in height, and landscape screening elements.



This small lot development maxes out the building envelope and does not respond to surrounding context.



By breaking down the height, massing, and facade of the buildings, this small lot development becomes more compatible with the surrounding neighborhood.



The use of unique building materials and accent colors helps to articulate the facade and entrance of this corner building.



The Buzz Court development alternates texture, color, and materials on the front facade.



Small overhangs above the doors at Maltman Bungalows provide shade and shelter, as well as adding articulation to the entryway.

## BUILDING FACADE GUIDELINES

The building facade is a crucial element in relating the building to the street and neighborhood. Design elements such as porches and stoops can be used to orient the housing towards the street and promote active and interesting neighborhoods. Effectively placed and articulated doors, windows, and balconies can enhance the overall quality of the project.

- 1 Employ architectural details to enhance scale and interest by breaking the facade up into distinct planes that are offset from the main building facade.
- 2 The placement of windows should follow a consistent rhythm to create visual clarity and character-defining features while avoiding the creation of blank walls.
- 3 Provide windows on building facades that front on public streets, private driveways, and internal pedestrian pathways within the development.
- 4 Layer architectural features to emphasize elements such as entries, corners, windows, and organization of units.
- 5 Alternate different textures, colors, materials, and distinctive architectural treatments to add visual interest while avoiding blank facades.
- 6 Treat all facades of the building with an equal level of detail, articulation, and architectural rigor.
- 7 Include overhead architectural features at entrances and windows that provide shade and passive cooling.
- 8 Design balconies so that their size and location maximize their intended use for open space. Avoid “tacked on” balconies with limited purpose or function.
- 9 Reduce the monotony of undifferentiated facades through landscape screening elements, entry enhancements, and building/garage facades.

## BUILDING MATERIALS GUIDELINES

Los Angeles architecture varies in style often within neighborhoods. Therefore, context and surrounding structures should inform the choice of materials for small lot developments.

- 1 Select building materials, such as architectural details and finishes, that convey a sense of permanence. Quality materials should be used to withstand weather and wear regardless of architectural style.
- 2 Apply trim, metal and woodwork, lighting, and other details in a harmonious manner that is consistent with the proportions and scale of the buildings.
- 3 Materials should appropriately respond to the neighborhood context.
- 4 Apply changes in material purposefully and in a manner corresponding to variations in building mass.



The Gatsby Homes in Hollywood demonstrates how to use different materials in response to building mass.

## ROOF GUIDELINES

While townhouses should exhibit some individuality, excessively varied, multi-pitched and gabled roofs tend to create visual chaos that is undesirable and unnecessary.

- 1 Integrate varied roof lines into the upper floors of residences through the use of sloping roofs, modulated building heights, gables, dormers, and innovative architectural techniques.
- 2 Avoid excessive use of multi-pitched and gabled roofs
- 3 Where appropriate, consider enhancing roof areas with usable open space.
- 4 Consider the design and placement of ridge locations as well as direction in relation to side yards and atriums



Excessively varied and multi-pitched roofs risk create visual chaos.



## SPECIAL GUIDELINES for **GROUND-FLOOR COMMERCIAL USES**

Small lot developments along commercial corridors may be required to provide ground-floor commercial uses along the streetfront. Similar to standard commercial projects, these mixed-use small lots must employ high-quality architecture to define the character of the proposed development. Storefronts must be vibrant, transparent, and protected, and most importantly, be compatible with the form and character of the existing commercial district.



Ground-floor commercial spaces in the Eagle Rock small lot development feature recessed entrances, protective awnings, and wide windows for a pleasant pedestrian experience.



The Evo and Luma residential towers in Downtown Los Angeles features live-work units with ground-floor commercial and attached upper-level residences.

- 1 Ensure that storefronts convey an individual expression of each tenant's identity while adhering to a common architectural theme and rhythm.
- 2 Design storefronts with a focus on window design to create a visual connection between the interior and exterior.
- 3 Incorporate traditional storefront elements by including a solid base for storefront windows. Use high quality durable materials such as smooth stucco or concrete, ceramic tile, or stone for the window base.
- 4 Provide shelter from the sun and rain for pedestrians along the public right-of-way where the buildings meet the street. Extend overhead cover across driveways or provide architecturally integrated awnings, arcades, and canopies.
- 5 Align awnings with others on the block, particularly the bottom edge of the awning. Coordinate the awning color with the color scheme of the entire building front.
- 6 Ensure that store entrances are recessed, not flush, with the edge of the building facade to articulate the storefront and provide shelter for persons entering and exiting.



This small lot development in Eagle Rock is the first to feature ground-floor retail. Individual commercial tenants occupy the ground floor of the single-family homes along a commercial corridor.