

WATERFRONT AREA AESTHETIC CRITERIA FOR NEW DEVELOPMENT ASSESSMENT

I. BACKGROUND

The Locating New Development Section of the Local Coastal Plan (LCP) provides for protecting, maintaining and enhancing the visual qualities of the City's Waterfront Area by establishing criteria to evaluate the appropriate intensity of potential development. These criteria are based on the visual resources which presently exist: openness; lack of congestion; naturalness; and rhythm. Policy 12.2 requires that the impact of new development be evaluated with respect to those resources. The policy further requires that the City develop objective criteria to assist decision makers in assessing the impacts of new development.

II. WATERFRONT AREA

The Waterfront Area is the area south of U.S. Highway 101 between Pershing Park and the Harbor on the west and Milpas Street on the east (See attached map, Figure 1). The area includes major recreational facilities including the Santa Barbara Harbor and Marina, Stearns Wharf and Chase Palm Park. The Waterfront Area also includes area designated for a wide variety of general and ocean-oriented industrial and visitor-serving commercial uses.

III. EVALUATION MATRIX

In accordance with Section 30251 of the Coastal Act, the scenic and visual qualities of the coastal areas are to be protected, restored and enhanced. Section 30252 requires that public access be maintained and enhanced. These parameters can be compared to the aspects of openness, lack of congestion, naturalness and rhythm. The attached matrix (Figure 2) illustrates how these parameters can be evaluated on a project by project basis. The decision maker, in using this worksheet, can evaluate a project's positive, negative or indifferent aesthetic effect on the Waterfront Area's ambiance. Application of the following evaluation criteria will help in determining if a project protects, maintains and enhances visual quality.

IV. EVALUATION CRITERIA

The dimensions described below define each section illustrated on the attached Evaluation Matrix (Figure 2). These dimensions can be considered as increments or measures to gauge a particular development's aesthetic performance and its relationship with the surrounding neighborhood. This matrix is for use by the decision maker and the applicant/developer to determine on an individual and/or collective basis the project's aesthetic relationship to the Waterfront Area:

A. DIMENSIONS

1. Openness. One of the special qualities of the Santa Barbara Waterfront is its sense of openness and freedom from clutter, with unimpaired views of the shoreline and mountains. The beaches are broad and enhanced by the presence of Chase Palm Park, the Andree Clark Bird Refuge, and predominantly one-story buildings on the north side of Cabrillo Boulevard.

Several dimensions of openness can be identified:

- a. Building density, scale, mass and height. In protecting, enhancing and restoring openness, this dimension is the most important. Each development, large or small, must be critically gauged as to its relationship with the surrounding neighborhood; essentially how well the project fits in. Buildings which provide setbacks and building separation promote the feeling of openness and allow views to the ocean. Stepping back the second and third stories from the edges of the property provides visual separation from buildings on adjacent properties which maintains views to the foothills and mountains.

Pedestrian orientation in building and site design is vitally important in promoting human scale. Buildings that open up to and are oriented to the pedestrian invite and promote the visitor-serving aspect of the Waterfront Area.

The south side of Cabrillo Boulevard where there are public facilities provided promotes the feeling of openness and allows views to the ocean. The recently approved (not yet developed) Park Plaza Hotel project proposed on the north side of Cabrillo Boulevard provides in its design major building separations, view corridors and height limitations (one and two stories closer to Cabrillo Blvd. and limited three stories set back to the rear of the property) which will preserve views to the mountains and foothills and will maintain a scale that will protect, enhance and restore the feeling of openness in the Waterfront Area. The Ambassador Park area on the north side of Cabrillo Boulevard in the West Beach area provides a distinct view separation, promotes visual relief and views to the ocean and Harbor.

By contrast, portions of the north side of Cabrillo Boulevard are intensely developed and do not promote openness. The East Beach townhouses and the Mar Monte (Sheraton) Hotel are large, imposing structures which appear to intrude into the open space area. Such structures do not protect, enhance and restore the feeling of openness in the Waterfront Area.

- b. Functional access. A number of aspects facilitate being able to get to the Waterfront easily and contribute to a sense of openness. These include the absence of private property on the south side of the boulevard; convenience of parking along the boulevard, especially on the south side; the general absence of obstructions to and along the beach, though there are some notable exceptions (Stearns Wharf, Harbor facilities, art show on Sunday); and proximity to many residential neighborhoods.
- c. Land use patterns. Several aspects of land use patterns support openness. The residential areas are compact, yet open and green. Neighborhood parks (e.g., Pershing, Punta Gorda) contribute to the feeling of openness,

and complement the parks directly adjacent to the beach. Low scale commercial structures are in keeping with low scale residences. In a sense, the neighborhoods spill out and open onto the Waterfront, rather than being confined or blocked by heavy industrial uses or major arterial highways as in many urban areas.

- d. **Vegetation.** The ultimate scale and mass of landscaping is an important consideration in maintaining openness. While there are many palm trees along Chase Palm Park, they enhance the openness and do not obstruct the overall views to the ocean and foothills. On the other hand, the treeline north of Cabrillo Boulevard on the Southern Pacific property blocks views to the foothills and mountains and may conflict with openness at that location. Hence, landscaping material should be carefully selected so that, when mature, it enhances views and avoids blocking or hindering openness.
2. **Lack of Congestion.** The sense of openness in the Waterfront is unquestionably enhanced by a relative lack of congestion. With the exception of summer weekends, one can still move freely along the beaches, bikeways, and Cabrillo Boulevard in relative quiet.
 - a. **Traffic flow.** Traffic flow along the Waterfront has increased dramatically in all modes. Cabrillo Boulevard has all the attributes of a “grand boulevard.” Motorists can drive along leisurely and enjoy the view, unimpeded by cross traffic or stop lights. Increased congestion, however, especially during summer weekends will degrade this feeling. Heavy traffic, hazards due to conflicts with bicycles and pedestrians crossing the boulevard, and the congestion in the vicinity of the art show, reduce the experience to the level of a four lane arterial during rush hour.
 - b. **Parking.** Parking on the south side of the boulevard interferes with the view, especially when the art show is in progress, and poses hazards to bicyclists and motorists. While more off-street parking may be desirable, its placement in parking lots on the beach clashes severely with the naturalness of the setting. The presence of autos, whether moving or parked, leads to a feeling of congestion.
 - c. **Public facilities planning.** The placing of public facilities all along the Waterfront, rather than concentrating them in one or two locations, contributes to an uncongested Waterfront. The Harbor, however, is the exception. Here, parking lots stretch from Leadbetter Beach to the municipal pool, and are filled by an assortment of vehicles, including cars, boats, trailers, and RVs. This high concentration, while necessary for the Harbor to function, detracts from the openness and lack of congestion which should be achieved.

- d. Land use patterns. While motels and other commercial uses add to congestion, their being mixed with residential uses helps distribute the intensity. Accompanying noise and congestion are also more evenly diffused, helping to relieve localized concentrations of noise and intense activity.
3. Naturalness. The Waterfront's openness and lack of congestion are complemented by the natural setting in which Santa Barbara lies. Views to the foothills and mountains are still largely unimpeded by structures; in particular, the views from Stearns Wharf, Chase Palm Park, and East Beach offer unparalleled beauty. The coastal greenery and landscaping, the contour of the beaches and coastline in this area, and the sandy beaches all contribute to the strong image of Santa Barbara's natural beauty. These following dimensions form the basis for criteria which can be used to judge whether or not projects proposed for the Waterfront will uphold the quality of naturalness.
 - a. Views. Views are the most important dimension of naturalness. These views are to the ocean, other points along the Waterfront, and to the foothills and mountains. The contrast between the sweep of the coastline and the sweep of the mountains is especially dramatic and heightened by the linear elements of Chase Palm Park and Cabrillo Boulevard.
 - b. Public aesthetics. The spacious and well-planned public facilities provide a calm contrast to the busy city for both residents and visitors. These facilities and public amenities show that the people of Santa Barbara care, and that they have balanced economics with natural aesthetics. This is especially evident in the contrast between the north and south sides of Cabrillo Boulevard. While the north side is commercial, the south side is predominantly low density recreation and park space.

However, there are a number of points of concern which future developers must consider in working through the dynamics of this balance. The north side of Cabrillo Boulevard, especially from State Street to Pershing Park, warrants special consideration. While the Spanish motif helps to unify structural elements, there are other elements which should be considered to create a unity such as signing, lighting, detailing and color.
 - c. Landscaping. Landscaping enhances the feeling of naturalness of the Waterfront. A number of aspects of landscaping are important in promoting the feeling of naturalness. These include undeveloped landscaping, use of mature shrubbery and trees, as in Chase Palm Park, and the contrast of tall trees and low shrubbery.
 - d. Adjacency. Adjacency is an important dimension of naturalness. The parks and the beaches are adjacent to the Boulevard (e.g., East Beach, Leadbetter Beach). This promotes a sense of having natural wealth and beauty readily available.

4. Rhythm. The Waterfront has evolved slowly over the years, both resisting and accepting various patterns, both human and natural, which combine to create a richly dimensioned image of the Waterfront. There are daily patterns, the weekend-weekday contrasts, the sun, which both rises and sets on the Waterfront. There is the early morning haze which breaks by afternoon, the ebb and flow of people biking, skating, standing in lines for dinner. There is diversity in this rhythm, and care expressed by the diversity which exists. Rhythm is an extremely subtle resource quality, yet it gives strength to all the other qualities which characterize the Waterfront.

Rhythm includes:

- a. Diversity. Diversity refers to the number of differences existing in the Waterfront. First, there are many things to do – driving, walking, biking, skating, eating, jogging, strolling through the art show on Sunday. Second, there is variety in the way these things can be done with facilities of different kinds and intensities to support these activities. Sometimes, however, these facilities are heavily used by conflicting activities, as is the bikeway at present. Third, there is social complexity. The Waterfront is not just a tourist mecca; people also live and work there. The Harbor in particular is a working harbor with both residential and commercial purpose.
- b. Use patterns. Diversity creates differences in use patterns, and use patterns themselves vary. It is important to note that there are patterns, rather than one stream of continuous activity. These differences in use patterns allow people to pick and choose the times and places for enjoying the Waterfront. Probably the most clear cut example of how differences coexist and create their own rhythm is given by the art show. On Sunday, the art show adds excitement and provides a focal point for visitors and residents alike. By Sunday evening, and for the rest of the week, it has disappeared.
- c. Design details. Rhythm occurs spontaneously and is a normal outcome of diversity. Small details, however, modulate rhythms or suppress them altogether. Conversely, design can create rhythm by providing settings for new activities.

B. PARAMETERS

The three (3) parameters; protects, enhances and restores, are further defined as follows:

1. Protects: This means that the dimensions are incorporated into project design to a degree that defends or guards against damage or injury to the existing ambience of the area.

2. Enhances: This means that the dimensions are incorporated into project design to a degree that raises to a higher degree, intensifies or raises the value of the visual qualities of the area.
3. Restores: This means that the dimensions are incorporated into a project design to a degree that returns to a state of soundness or vigor or normal condition the visual qualities of the area.

FIGURE 2

DIMENSIONS		PARAMETERS		
		PROTECTS	ENHANCES	RESTORES
OPENNESS	Building Density, Scale and Mass			
	Functional Access			
	Land Use Patterns			
	Vegetation			
LACK OF CONGESTION	Traffic Flow			
	Parking			
	Public Facilities Planning			
	Land Use Patterns			
NATURALNESS	Views			
	Public Aesthetics			
	Landscaping			
	Adjacency			
RHYTHM	Diversity			
	Use Patterns			
	Design Details			

+ Means: Creates a Positive Effect
 - Means: Creates a Negative Effect
 0 Means: Neither a Positive or Negative Effect