



AGENCY:	Planning Commission
MEETING DATE:	March 16, 2022
DEPARTMENT:	Community Development
PRESENTED BY:	K. Locke & S. McCormick

## AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

### **TITLE:**

**Conduct Public Hearing, Receive Report, and Make Recommendations to Staff Regarding Proposed Citywide Design Guidelines Update**

### **BACKGROUND**

The City of Fort Bragg's current Design Guidelines were initially adopted by the City Council in 2004. The Guidelines are an integral part of city planning in Fort Bragg and help retain and enhance community character and maintain property values. While effective on many levels, the existing Guidelines have become outdated and do not effectively address current trends and many proposed projects. In 2019, the Planning Commission and City Council considered revisions to the Citywide Design Guidelines as part of a comprehensive community planning process to rezone the former mill site (**Attachment 2 – 2019 Draft Guidelines**).

This planning effort did not result in a formal adoption of the draft 2019 Guidelines. In 2021 an ad hoc committee was appointed composed of two Councilmembers (Albin-Smith and Morsell-Haye) and two Planning Commissioners (Andreis and Rogers), to complete an update to the City's Design Guidelines. The Design Guideline Ad Hoc Committee met multiple times from February 2021 to February 2022 with the intent to refine and finalize the work completed in 2019, rather than to start "from scratch".

### **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

#### *What are Design Guidelines?*

The Citywide Design Guidelines are a qualitative document independent of the General Plan, Inland Land Use and Development Code (ILUDC), and Coastal Land Use and Development Code (CLUDC). The goal of the Design Guidelines is to provide clear and useful recommendations and requirements for the design, construction, review, and approval of commercial, industrial, and multi-family residential development in Fort Bragg - a reference point that establishes design expectations and offers a way of achieving attractive and functional development.

As opposed to the ILUDC or CLUDC, the Design Guidelines are also intended to be interpreted with some flexibility as not all design criteria may be achievable/appropriate for each project. For example, in some circumstances, one guideline may be relaxed in order to accomplish another, more important guideline. The overall objective is to ensure that the intent and spirit of the Guidelines are followed and to attain the best possible design within reason.

AGENDA ITEM NO. \_\_\_\_\_

### *Relation to Other Documents*

Fort Bragg's Design Guidelines provide an important benchmark for evaluating new construction, additions, and remodels, and are the basis for making the findings necessary for many project approvals. Sections 18.71.050(F)(7) and 17.71.050(F)(7) of the Inland and Coastal Development Codes require a Design Review permit for most construction activities and further establish that such permit may not be issued unless the design complies and is consistent with the Design Guidelines. The Guidelines also implement General Plan policies related to Community Design.

## **REVISIONS FROM 2019 GUIDELINES**

**Design and Format.** The 2019 Design Guidelines primarily relied on tables to relate information. Rather than continuing to rely on this format, the 2021 document employs columns of text with intermittent images. One of the major changes allowing for this transition is the removal of size standards for specific guidelines. The 2019 Guidelines make a distinction between <5000SF and >5000SF buildings and the 2021 document does not. In removing this standard, the Ad-Hoc Team reassessed all of the standards to determine whether they should be mandatory or preferred. Changes to the original guidelines are provided in tracked changes as attachments (**Attachments 3, 4, and 5**).

**Guiding Principles.** Situations may arise that are not covered by the guidelines. As such, the latest revision includes four new guiding principles that project designers should also consider: 1) Strengthen Community Character; 2) Support Connectivity; 3) Public Enhancements; and 4) Water & Energy Efficiency. These guiding principles were drafted to reflect ideas from community engagement efforts, existing City Council approved documents, and the work of the Design Review Ad Hoc Committee.

**Geographic Corridors Rather than Zoning Districts.** The 2022 update differs from past updates by considering design within the context of where development is situated, rather than relying on the zoning designation. This proposed change refines how development impacts the characteristics of different geographic areas in order to achieve optimal design. For example, the characteristic of S. Franklin Street differs significantly from N. Main Street, although both are designated General Commercial Zoning. As such, these "Corridors" are proposed to have separate guidelines distinct to each location and their respective qualities.

**Signs.** Similar to the distinction between building square footage, the 2019 Guidelines separated signs based on those less than 25SF or greater than 25SF. The ad hoc team in the 2021 document decided to remove this distinction and reassess any guidelines in conflict. These changes, along with additional proposed guidelines are included in **Attachment 6**.

**Exceptional Design Exemption.** The proposed Design Guidelines now include a process by which a project applicant may request an exemption to certain design criteria. The intent is to allow for truly place-making design that the guidelines would prohibit. The approval of this exemption would be through Planning Commission or City Council based on the following findings:

- Approving the exemption will not create a safety hazard or impair the integrity and character of the neighborhood in which the property is located.
- Buildings and projects shall facilitate fundamentally new materials, methods, and tectonic articulations and/or forms of construction.
- The proposed project meets the purpose and guiding principles of the Design Guidelines.

**Removal of Repetitive Standards.** In evaluating the Design Guidelines, the ad hoc team noted redundant guidelines that overlapped with development standards of the ILUDC and CLUDC. As seen in the attachments, several redundant guidelines have been removed.

**DISCUSSION & NEXT STEPS**

As a result of the proposed changes, the ad hoc team and staff are seeking input from commissioners and the public. A draft of the proposed guidelines may be found on **Attachment 1**. Staff has prepared a presentation to facilitate discussion at the March 16, 2022 Planning Commission meeting.

At the conclusion of the study session, the following next steps would occur:

Action	Timeframe
City staff would make the requested revisions by the Commission and the public.	March 16-30
City staff return to Planning Commission for recommendation of adoption of Design Guidelines to City Council	March 30
City Council holds a public hearing considering adoption of the Design Guidelines	Mid to late April
Document becomes effective 30 days after adoption	Late May to early June

**ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION:**

The proposed project is categorically exempt from environmental review in conformance with CEQA section 15061(b)(3). The proposed amendments will not allow for, or encourage any more development than is already anticipated under the City’s existing General Plan, or otherwise allow for or promote physical changes in the environment, and therefore, it can be seen with certainty that there is no possibility that the proposed amendments may have a significant impact on the environment.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:**

That the Planning Commission review the draft Design Guidelines and provide feedback to the ad hoc team and staff.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. 2022 Draft Citywide Design Guidelines
2. 2019 Draft Guidelines
3. Revisions. General Guidelines
4. Revisions, Specific Land Uses
5. Revisions, Mixed Use Guidelines
6. Revisions, Sign Guidelines