

6. COMMUNITY DESIGN ELEMENT

A. Purpose

The Community Design Element is concerned primarily with the protection of the visual resources and quality in the Coastal Zone and the City, or what residents and visitors see. The City's appearance is essential to the quality of life in Fort Bragg. Visual quality and amenities go hand-in-hand with long-term economic development strategies, and strengthen the stability and desirability of the community. To be attractive to residents, visitors, and businesses, the City must be concerned about its appearance, physical character, and livability. Existing residential real estate values and the desirability of businesses that depend on tourism are closely tied to the visual character of the community.

This element contains sections addressing: Visual Analyses for development in the Coastal Zone; Design Review; the Central Business District; historic preservation; and public art and spaces.

The Community Design Element establishes goals, policies, and programs to preserve and enhance Fort Bragg's authentic, small town character. The community is defined in part by its isolated location on the magnificent coastline of Mendocino County. Its sense of place derives from its heritage as a regional center for the timber and fishing industries. As the economy evolves to a more tourism and service-based economy, the community has acknowledged the importance of maintaining the historic identity of downtown and the integrity of the residential neighborhoods, while enhancing views and access to the coastline and planning for continued growth and development.

B. Community Design and the Coastal Act

Protection of visual resources is called for by the Coastal Act. Section 30251 of the Coastal Act states that the scenic and visual qualities of coastal areas shall be considered and protected as a resource of public importance. Permitted development shall be sited and designed to protect views to and along the ocean and scenic coastal areas to minimize alteration of natural land forms, to be visually compatible with the character of surrounding areas, and, where feasible, to restore and enhance visual quality in visually degraded areas. The Local Coastal Program Background Report contains an inventory of scenic views.

Fort Bragg has many valuable visual resources in the Coastal Zone, including high bluffs, jutting headlands, wetlands, serene river estuaries, beaches, and dunes. The mature trees that front the west side of Main Street between the North Cliff Hotel and Maple Street provide an important visual resource. Scenic resources attract many visitors to these areas and provide the basis for the City's tourist industry. Visual resources can be readily degraded through poorly-designed and located structures, roads, signs, and utility lines that block coastal views, alter natural landforms, and detract from the small town character of the community.

In addition, Section 30253 of the Coastal Act states that new development shall, where appropriate, protect special communities and neighborhoods which, because of their unique characteristics, are popular visitor destination points for recreational uses.

B. Citywide Design Guidelines

Most new development in the City is subject to a design review process which is intended to ensure that it preserves and enhances the aesthetic character of its setting. Compliance with the Citywide Design Guidelines is the basis for Design Review approval. While the Guidelines are flexible in order to encourage innovative and creative designs, they do include many requirements that are qualitative statements rather than quantitative standards. There are many acceptable ways to meet each of the Guidelines.

The Citywide Design Guidelines are intended to be flexible and to encourage innovative and creative designs. For this reason, the Guidelines are generally qualitative statements rather than quantitative standards, and there are many acceptable ways to meet each of the Guidelines. Design Review approval requirements do not replace, supersede or otherwise modify the independent requirement for a coastal development permit approved pursuant to the applicable policies and standards of the certified LCP.

C. Historic Preservation

Much of Fort Bragg was built during the first half of the twentieth century, and the built environment in the Central Business District and many of the neighborhoods reflects the architectural heritage of the community. Fort Bragg's architecturally significant buildings and structures convey a sense of the community's history, providing a link to the past and strengthening the City's identity. From the Sherwood Pomo who lived in the area for over 5,000 years to the more recent European settlers seeking lumber, fish, and fur, the landscape has seen remarkable transformations.

The City has a Historic Building Inventory that identifies buildings, sites, structures, and objects of cultural and historical importance. The purpose of the Inventory is to preserve the community's heritage by facilitating use of the State of California's Historic Building Code. To be included in the Historic Building Inventory, a structure must be at least 40 years old and meet other criteria related to its design and history. The Inventory is not a comprehensive description of all historically or culturally significant buildings or sites in the community, and a property is listed at the owner's request.


D. The Central Business District

The Central Business District (CBD) is the heart of the community's commercial, civic, historic, and cultural life. It is the area with the largest concentration of historic buildings such as the Skunk Train Depot, the Guest House Museum, the Old Fort Building, Town Hall, City Hall, and numerous commercial and residential structures. The combined efforts of government and property owners will ensure that the attractiveness of the downtown will be preserved and enhanced. Increasing pedestrian activity, improving street lighting, parking, and amenities, and ensuring that renovations and new construction maintain the historic scale and character of this area will foster the continued vitality of the CBD.



Old Fort Building, 430 North Franklin Street

E. Goals, Policies, and Programs

The following policies demarcated with the Fort Bragg City seal:  are not part of the certified LCP and do not govern the review and approval of coastal development permits: Policy CD-2.6, Policy CD-3.3, Policy CD-7.3, and Policy CD-8.1.

Goal CD-1 Preserve and enhance scenic views.

Policy CD-1.1: Visual Resources: Permitted development shall be designed and sited to protect views to and along the ocean and scenic coastal areas, to minimize the alteration of natural landforms, to be visually compatible with the character of surrounding areas, and, where feasible, to restore and enhance scenic views in visually degraded areas.

Program CD-1.1.1: Require Design Review of new development or significant expansion to existing development¹ located in areas designated "Potential Scenic Views Toward the Ocean or the Noyo River" on Map CD-1: Scenic Views in the Coastal Zone.

Policy CD-1.2: The large trees fronting the west side of Highway One between the North Cliff Hotel and Cypress Street shall be retained as far as feasible; trees may be removed if they are dead or damaged or pose a public safety hazard, or to provide driveways or new public streets. The forested area north of the Georgia-Pacific nursery and south of Maple Street shall be maintained as a sensitive natural habitat and scenic resource, and it shall not be developed.

Policy CD-1.3: Visual Analysis Required. A Visual Analysis shall be required for all development located in areas designated "Potential Scenic Views Toward the Ocean or the Noyo River" on Map CD-1 except development listed in below. Development exempt from Visual Analysis includes the following:

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1. The replacement of any structure, other than a public works facility, destroyed by a disaster. The replacement structure shall conform to applicable existing zoning requirements, shall be for the same use as the destroyed structure, shall not exceed either the floor area, height, or bulk of the destroyed structure by more than 10 percent, and shall be sited in the same location on the affected property as the destroyed structure.
2. The demolition and reconstruction of a single-family residence; provided, that the reconstructed residence shall not exceed either the floor area, height or bulk of the former structure by more than 10 percent, and that the reconstructed residence shall be sited in the same location on the affected property as the former structure.
3. Improvements to any structure which do not change the intensity of its use, which do not increase either the floor area, height, or bulk of the structure by more than 10 percent, which do not block or impede public access, and which do not result in a seaward encroachment by the structure.
4. The reconstruction or repair of any seawall; provided, however, that the reconstructed or repaired seawall is not seaward of the location of the former structure.
5. Any repair or maintenance activity for which the Director determines has no potential for impacts to visual resources.

Definitions as used in this subsection:

1. "Disaster" means any situation in which the force or forces which destroyed the structure to be replaced were beyond the control of its owner.
2. "Bulk" means total interior cubic volume as measured from the exterior surface of the structure.
3. "Structure" includes landscaping and any erosion control structure or device which is similar to that which existed prior to the occurrence of the disaster.

Policy CD-1.4: New development shall be sited and designed to minimize adverse impacts on scenic areas visible from scenic roads or public viewing areas to the maximum feasible extent.

Policy CD-1.5: All new development shall be sited and designed to minimize alteration of natural landforms by:

1. Conforming to the natural topography.
2. Preventing substantial grading or reconfiguration of the project site.
3. Minimizing flat building pads on slopes. Building pads on sloping sites shall utilize split level or stepped-pad designs.
4. Requiring that man-made contours mimic the natural contours.
5. Ensuring that graded slopes blend with the existing terrain of the site and surrounding area.
6. Minimizing grading permitted outside of the building footprint.
7. Clustering structures to minimize site disturbance and to minimize development area.
8. Minimizing height and length of cut and fill slopes.
9. Minimizing the height and length of retaining walls.
10. Cut and fill operations may be balanced on-site, where the grading does not substantially alter the existing topography and blends with the surrounding area. Export of cut material may be required to preserve the natural topography.

Policy CD-1.6: Fences, walls, and landscaping shall minimize blockage of scenic areas from roads, parks, beaches, and other public viewing areas.

Policy CD-1.7: Bluff Face and Bluff Retreat Setback Development. Development on the bluff face and within the bluff retreat setback shall be limited to the following uses with a conditional use permit where there is no feasible less environmentally damaging alternative, feasible mitigation measures have been provided to minimize all adverse environmental impacts, and allowable structures are designed be visually compatible with the surrounding area to the maximum extent feasible.

- (a) engineered accessways or staircases to beaches, boardwalks, viewing platforms, and trail alignments for public access purposes,
- (b) pipelines to serve coastal dependent industry,
- (c) habitat restoration,
- (d) hazardous materials remediation, and
- (e) landform alterations where such alterations re-establish natural landforms and drainage patterns that have been eliminated by previous development activities.

Policy CD-1.8: Blufftop development shall incorporate a setback from the edge of the bluff that avoids and minimizes visual impacts from the beach and ocean below. The blufftop setback necessary to protect visual resources may be in excess of the setback necessary to ensure that risk from geologic hazards are minimized for the life of the structure, as detailed in Policy SF-B.

Policy CD-1.9: Exterior lighting (except traffic lights, navigational lights, and other similar safety lighting) shall be minimized, restricted to low intensity fixtures, shielded and directed down so that no light shines beyond the boundary of the property. No night lighting shall be permitted directly over marine waters. All outdoor lighting shall be shorter wavelength "bird friendly" lighting that avoids attracting birds at night.

Policy CD-1.10: All proposed divisions of land and boundary line adjustments shall be analyzed for consistency of potential future development with the visual resource protection policies of the LCP, and no division of land or boundary line adjustment shall be approved if development of resulting parcel(s) would be inconsistent with these policies.

Policy CD-1.11: New development shall minimize removal of natural vegetation. Existing native trees and plants shall be preserved on the site to the maximum extent feasible.

Program CD.1.11.1: Consider amending the Coastal LUDC to adopt additional design standards to protect scenic resources.

Policy CD-1.12 Maintain Unobstructed Views of the Ocean: Require new development north of Pudding Creek to leave unblocked views to the ocean from Highway One.

Policy CD-1.13: Retain Views North of Pudding Creek. New development north of Pudding Creek and west of Main Street on parcels with total frontage of more than 135 feet, on either the Haul Road or Main Street as determined by the Planning Commission, shall be required to leave a minimum of 30 percent of the project's total parcel frontage free of view-blocking development. The area free of view-blocking development shall not include narrow passageways between buildings on the site, and shall be concentrated.

Policy CD-1.14 All new development (including decks and balconies) north of Pudding Creek shall be set back at least 30 feet from the edge of the Old Haul Road and shall be consistent with all other applicable LCP setback requirements.

Goal CD-2: Ensure that new development demonstrates excellence of design and sensitivity to the character of the surrounding neighborhood.

Policy CD-2.1 Citywide Design Guidelines: Ensure that new development and remodels are constructed in a manner consistent with the Citywide Design Guidelines. Design Review approval requirements shall not replace, supersede or otherwise modify the independent requirement for a coastal development permit approved pursuant to the applicable policies and standards of the certified LCP

Program CD-2.1.1: Periodically update the Citywide Design Guidelines.

Program CD-2.1.2 Commercial and Multi-Family Development: Continue to complete Design Review of commercial and multi-family development to ensure that they fit harmoniously with the scale and design of existing buildings and streetscape of the City.

2Policy CD-2.2 Discourage Sameness and Repetitive Residential Designs.

Policy CD2.3 - Scenic Views and Resource Areas: Ensure that development does not adversely impact scenic views and resources as seen from public rights-of-way.



Policy CD-2.4 Property Maintenance and Nuisances: Ensure that properties are well maintained and nuisances are abated.

Program CD-2.4.1: Continue to implement and enforce the City's nuisance abatement ordinance, and update it, as necessary, to ensure that property values are maintained throughout the City.

Program CD-2.4.2: Provide Code enforcement for immediate health and safety violations in conjunction with the building inspection process.

-Policy CD-2.5 Strip Development: Discourage strip development along Main Street.

Strip development is typically characterized by street frontage parking lots serving individual or strips of stores or restaurants. It differs from central business districts and shopping centers in that typically there are no provisions for pedestrian access between individual uses, the uses are only one-store deep, the buildings are arranged linearly rather than clustered, and there is no design integration among individual uses.

Goal CD-3 Preserve the Central Business District as the commercial, civic, historic, and cultural center of the community.

Policy CD-3.1 Adaptive Reuse: Facilitate the adaptive reuse of existing older buildings in the Central Business District.

Program CD-3.1.1: Consider establishing a low-interest revolving loan fund for the renovation and upgrading of older buildings in the Central Business District, with incentives for the reuse of vacant or underutilized upper floors for housing.

Policy CD-3.2 Pedestrian Activity: Encourage increased pedestrian movement and activity in the Central Business District.

Program CD-3.2.2: Continue to support the operation of a Farmer's Market and a multitude of street fairs and promotional activities in the Central Business District.



New Streetscape in Downtown Fort Bragg

Policy CD-2.3 Economic Vitality: Continue to support the economic diversity and vitality of downtown businesses.

Program CD-2.3.1: Consider establishing a Business Improvement District (BID) to stimulate increased business activity and revenues by helping to fund public improvements and loans and/or grants for private improvements in the Central Business District.

Program CD-2.3.2: Continue to periodically update the City's Economic Development Strategy.

Policy CD-3.4 Parking: Improve the availability of public parking facilities in the Central Business District and other commercial areas.

Program CD-3.4.2: Implement shared parking agreements wherever feasible. Utilize, as appropriate, development agreements, conditions of approval, easements, and other means to assure shared parking arrangements.

Program CD-3.4.3: Consider reduced and/or flexible parking requirements in the Coastal LUDC for mixed use developments.

Program CD-3.4.4: Consider establishing a parking assessment district for the Central Business District to help finance the acquisition of property for additional off-street parking lots.

Program CD-3.4.5: Periodically update the Central Business District parking in-lieu fee program to ensure that it presents a fair and equitable alternative to the provision of on-site parking.

Policy CD-3.5 Strengthen the Distinctive Identity of the Central Business District: Strengthen the distinctive identity and unique sense of place of the Central Business District.

Program CD-3.5.1: Consider establishing a sign program for the Central Business District, with distinctive signs at the entryways to and within the Central Business District.

Program CD-3.5.2: Consider installing street lighting in the Central Business District which reflects the historic character of the area, for example, cast-iron standards, lower-intensity, warm light fixtures, and spot lighting for key historical buildings.

Program CD-3.5.3: Locate an area where a pocket park or a small plaza could be established for public gatherings, street fairs, concerts, and similar outdoor public events.

Goal CD-4 Create attractive entryways to the City.

Policy CD-4.1 Entryways: Clearly define the points of entry to the City through the use of distinctive signs, lighting, and landscaping.

Program CD-4.1: Maintain, distinctive signs placed in a landscaped area at the south entryway at Highway 20/Highway One and at the north entryway on Highway One at the City Limits.

Policy CD-4.2 Gateway Development: Encourage a higher quality of development at the City's gateways.

Program CD-4.2.1: Consider adopting the following standards for Gateway Developments in the Citywide Design Standards:

- Define gateway development as development located South of the Noyo Harbor Bridge or North of the Pudding Creek Bridge.
- Gateway development should not detract from views to the ocean.
- Signage should be modest in scale and should not block the viewshed.
- Significant landscaping shall be installed to reinforce the transition from a wilderness environment to an urban environment in gateway development. Landscaping should include trees and drought tolerant plants. Lawns are discouraged.
- Site design should include open space around the periphery of the gateway development to reinforce the transitional quality of the area.
- Site design should include installation of bike lanes and sidewalks.
- Gateway development should model Green Building techniques and materials.



Fort Bragg Gateway Welcome Sign

Goal CD-5 Improve the appearance and effectiveness of parking facilities.

Policy CD-5.1 Parking Location: Wherever feasible, locate parking facilities to the rear of the development so that the building facade is contiguous with the street frontage, and parking areas are hidden from the street.

Goal CD-6 Use lighting to create a sense of security and to provide cohesion to the physical structure of the community.

Policy CD-6.1: Security: Establish standards to ensure that on-site lighting is adequate to provide security while not producing excessive glare.

Policy CD-6.2: Lighting Design Review Guidelines: Apply lighting design guidelines in the Citywide Design Guidelines and the City's Zoning Ordinance.

Policy CD-6.3: Exterior lighting (except traffic lights, navigational lights, and other similar safety lighting) shall be minimized, restricted to low intensity fixtures, and shielded so that no light shines beyond the boundary of the property. All outdoor lighting shall be shorter wavelength "bird friendly" lighting that avoids attracting birds at night. No night lighting shall be permitted directly over marine waters.

Goal CD-7 Preserve cultural and historic resources.

Policy CD-7.1 Protect and Preserve Buildings and Sites with Historic and Cultural Significance to the Community.



Trestle at Pudding Creek: A historically significant structure at MacKerricher State Park

Program CD-7.1.1: Encourage property owners to list their buildings in the Historic Building Inventory.

Program CD-7.1.2: Consider approval of building permits using the State Historic Building Code, as appropriate.

Program CD-7.1.4: Establish incentives for the preservation and restoration of historic buildings and sites. Consider the following incentives: low interest loans for rehabilitation consistent with the original character of historic buildings, tax incentives for the preservation of historic structures, including the use of Mills Act preservation contracts, and awards or grants for the preservation and protection of historic buildings and those with cultural significance.

Program CD-7.1.5: Consider adopting an “Affirmative Maintenance” ordinance for buildings in commercial land use designations.

Program CD-7.1.6: Establish a procedure whereby property owners may initiate a program for preservation of historic structures within their neighborhood.

Policy CD-7.2 Discourage Demolitions: Discourage the demolition of historic buildings.

Program CD-7.2.1: Require archival research to determine the cultural and historic significance of buildings proposed for demolition, paid for by the project proponent.

Program CD-7.2.2: Revise the City’s Coastal Land Use & Development Code to require the preparation of drawings and/or photographic records and the salvaging or preservation of architectural fixtures of historic structures that are demolished.



Policy CD-7.3 Public Awareness: Increase public awareness and appreciation of the City’s cultural and historic resources.

Program CD-7.3.1: Work with the Fort Bragg-Mendocino Coast Historical Society to increase public awareness concerning the importance of historic preservation and the location of significant and protected structures in the City.

Program CD-7.3.2: Prepare a public information package describing available programs for property owners to restore and rehabilitate historic structures, including information on tax incentives.

Program CD-7.3.3: Support the activities of the Fort Bragg-Mendocino Coast Historical Society.



Guest House Museum, Main Street

Goal CD-8 Support Public Art and Open Space.



Policy CD-8.1 Public Art: Encourage the provision of murals, fountains, sculptures, and other forms of public art in public spaces and parks.

Program CD-8.1.1: Consider adopting a One-Percent for Art Program which would require one percent of the cost of construction of new public buildings and facilities to be allocated for public art.

Program CD-8.1.2: Consider implementing an ongoing outdoor sculpture exhibit adjacent to City Hall and/or in other locations, with an emphasis on supporting and showcasing local artists and reflecting the cultural life of the community.



Mural at Company Store

Policy CD-8.2 Provide Public Open Spaces: Encourage the development of public open spaces for gatherings and fairs in commercial areas of the City.

Program CD-8.2.1: Consider the purchase of appropriate locations for public open space and the enhancement of existing public spaces to accommodate community gatherings.

Program CD-8.2.2: Encourage the inclusion of public open spaces in new commercial development that is sufficiently large to accommodate such uses.