# 8.0

# COMMUNITY DESIGN ELEMENT

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Introduction



The Community Design Element brings together the physical elements and design features of Avenal, thereby establishing a strong sense of place and local identity. The unique characteristics that define the community are protected and encouraged in this element. Residential, commercial and industrial design as well as landscaping, streetscape, focal points, boundaries and vistas are addressed.

### *Purpose of the Community Design Element*

The Community Design Element addresses the conservation and enhancement of the visual quality of the Avenal environment. New development and redevelopment create pressure on the natural and historic resources in Avenal that form the community's unique character. The Community Design Element helps to preserve and improve the quality of life in Avenal by addressing: the protection of natural resources; the preservation and enhancement of the historical character of the community; the harmonious incorporation of new development into existing public and private development; and the maintenance of the community's "small-town, rural atmosphere."

### *Scope and Content of the Community Design Element*

The Community Design Element is not a State-mandated element, but is an important component of the Avenal General Plan. The Element comprises four sections: this Introduction; the Purpose of the Community Design Element; the Scope and Content of the Community Design Element; and Objectives, Policies and Standards. In the Objectives, Policies and Standards section, major issues related to the preservation and enhancement of the character of the community are identified and related policies and standards are established to address these issues.

## *8.1 Gateways/Streetscape Design*

### Objective

A. Improve the appearance of city streets.

### Policies and Standards

1. Promote a city-wide street tree planting program which enhances the appearance of the street and is scaled in relationship to the function of the roadway. Tree wells shall be located and designed to ensure adequate sight distance for traffic and pedestrian safety.

2. The undergrounding of utilities along the City's main corridors is a priority. In developing areas, new development projects shall place all new utility lines underground. The City will also explore a range of options for undergrounding utilities in existing developed areas.

3. Preserve and protect views of the coastal mountains from the City's major roadways. Local streets should also be oriented to maximize such views.

4. Ensure all signs are compatible with the overall streetscape design including the redesign/removal of signs, which are disruptive elements.

5. Outdoor advertising billboards shall not be allowed within the City limits.

6. Establish coordinated, distinctive and high quality signage, accent plantings and paving materials for entries into the City. Locations for this treatment include Skyline Boulevard, SH 33, Kings Street and City Arterial Streets. As primary entrances to the City, these streets should reflect higher standards of development. Standards should contain provisions for minimum building setbacks, landscaping, sidewalk pattern and street furniture, with distinctions made between upgrade of existing uses and new development. Proper orientation, design and architectural features shall be regulated through zoning and the site plan review process.

7. A special design overlay shall be developed for the Skyline Boulevard corridor which includes the following features:

    a. For new developments, landscape setbacks should be 20 feet, where existing development does not preclude.

    b. A street tree standard shall be adopted for the segment including large trees indigenous to the area including Sycamore, Poplar, and occasional seasonal color should be provided by Red Buds, Ginkgo and others. Trees should be planted in clusters to provide adequate view windows to commercial development along Skyline while achieving dense plantings at key locations.

c. Intersecting streets should have special entry treatments including low retaining walls with ornamental planting, commercial center signage integrated into the entry, and design features that provide interest such as rock outcroppings, river rock or other means.

d. Specific designs shall be approved as part of the overall master plan or specific plan for the development.

## *8.2 Residential Development*

**Objective**

A. Improve the appearance and condition of existing residential areas.

**Policies And Standards**

1. Continue to use Community Development Block Grant funds for housing conservation areas to rehabilitate existing dwellings.

2. Pursue removal of vehicles on residential property, which are abandoned, unregistered or in a state of disrepair. Existing City codes pertaining to abandoned vehicles shall be enforced.

3. Review the adequacy of existing Zoning Code enforcement procedures pertaining to property maintenance.

4. Encourage growth patterns that will promote livable neighborhood development principles including the following:

   a. Providing compact development so that vehicle use is reduced to the extent practicable, and so that vehicle trips are shorter.

   b. City neighborhoods (one square mile area) should have a mix of land uses including housing, schools, small shops and neighborhood shopping centers. Residential uses should be clustered within walking distance of commercial and service facilities.

   c. Neighborhoods should be designed as suburban "villages" with connectivity consistent with the circulation element's policies.

**Objective**

B. Promote high quality new residential neighborhoods.

**Policies and Standards**

1. Encourage innovative site planning and housing design.

2. Require site plan review procedures for all multi-family residential developments, including provisions for building setbacks, lot coverage, parking, access and circulation, outdoor lighting, signage, architecture and landscaping.

3. Require the planting of street trees in parkways.

4. The following techniques should be used in the design of multi-family residential development:

   a. Varying building planes setbacks within the same structure;

   b. Staggered and/or reversed unit plans to provide variability in the outward appearance of the building(s);

   c. Building materials and design that ensure consistency with adjacent land uses and structures;

   d. Adequate open space and landscaping;

   e. Dense landscaping adjacent to buildings;

   f. Encourage a variety of orientations to the buildings to avoid monotony; and

   g. Limitation on second story views to adjacent property.

5. Strengthen the City's sense of history by identifying and preserving historic structures throughout the community.

6. Buildings on a site should be linked visually through architectural style, colors and materials, signage, landscaping, design details such as light fixtures, and the use of arcades, trellises or other open structures.

7. The height and scale of new development should be compatible with that of surrounding buildings where an established pattern or character is apparent. New development should provide a transition from the height of adjacent structures to the maximum height of new development.

8. Tall dominating structures should be broken up by creating horizontal emphasis through the use of trim, awnings, eaves or other ornamentation, and by using a combination of complementary colors.

9. All mechanical roof equipment shall be screened from a horizontal line of sight from the public right of way. Screening should be an integral part of the roof design and not appear as a "tacked

on" afterthought. For flat roofs, a screen enclosure behind the parapet wall may be used if it is made to appear as an integral part of the structure's design. Ground or interior-mounted mechanical equipment (with appropriate screening) is encouraged as an alternative to roof-mounting.

10. Entries should be protected from the elements and should create a focus or sense of entry for the building. Wall recesses, roof overhangs, canopies, arches, signs, and similar architectural features should be integral elements of building design calling attention to the importance of the entry.

11. Landscaped areas should be clustered on a site to maximize their effect on the public view.

12. Landscaping should be used to define areas such as entrances to buildings and parking lots, define edges of various land uses, provide transition between neighboring properties (buffering), and provide screening for outdoor storage, loading and equipment areas.

13. Landscaping should be in scale with adjacent buildings and be of appropriate size at maturity to accomplish its intended purpose.

14. Areas of a site not utilized for parking, circulation, storage or other uses, shall be landscaped.

15. Parking shall be screened and visually subordinate to the development. Parking lots shall not overwhelm views of a site and shall incorporate landscaping for all areas not used for vehicle storage, access or circulation.

16. Site planning should emphasize a strong relationship to the adjoining street(s) and encourage pedestrian circulation and access. Pedestrian access shall be separate from vehicular access, where feasible.

17. Parking areas in multi-family residential projects should be visible from the units they serve and be located behind the building where possible. Long rows of garages or parking spaces should be avoided.

18. A landscaped planter should be provided for every ten spaces and should, where possible, align with building entrances.

19. Second story views to adjacent land areas should be discouraged.

20. All new residential development shall include a landscaped parkway adjacent to the street curb.

21. Require residential developments to plant and maintain adequate and attractive front yard landscaping.

22. The zoning ordinance shall be amended to increase landscaping setbacks to improve general neighborhood aesthetics.

23. The City shall encourage the development of middle and upper price range housing to increase housing opportunities for all economic segments of the community. The Residential Estate land use designation shall be used to encourage and preserve such housing types.

## *8.3 Commercial and Industrial Development*

**Objective**

A. Ensure that all commercial and industrial development is attractive and of high-quality design, to enhance the image of the city.

**Policies and Standards**

1. Establish site plan review procedures for all commercial and industrial development, including provisions for building setbacks, lot coverage, parking, access and circulation, outdoor lighting, signage and landscaping.

2. Promote rehabilitation of appropriate commercial sites and investigate funding opportunities for rehabilitation/remodeling of small businesses.

3. Site plans shall provide safe and well-defined pedestrian connections from buildings to parking areas, from buildings to the adjoining street(s), and among buildings on the same site. Pedestrian connections between commercial development and surrounding residential neighborhoods should also be provided.

4. Buildings, sidewalks and parking lots should be located to minimize conflicts between pedestrian and vehicular circulation on a site.

5. Loading and trash facilities shall be located where they may be adequately screened from view (generally at the rear of the structures, away from the street).

6. Long expanses of fence shall be offset and architecturally designed to prevent monotony, and shall include landscaped pockets and limited openings.

7. Promote rehabilitation of appropriate industrial sites and investigate funding opportunities for rehabilitation/remodeling of small businesses.

8. Site design for new industrial development shall consider the following:

    a. Controlled site access;

    b. Service, storage, and loading areas located at the rear or side of buildings;

    c. Screening of storage and outdoor work areas and equipment;

d. Landscaping, signage and other features to emphasize the main entrance; and

e. Landscaping for all areas not developed for parking, storage, buildings, etc.

9. Design elements which are undesirable and should be avoided include:

a. Large, blank, flat wall surfaces;

b. Exposed, untreated precision block walls;

c. Chain link fence and barbed wire;

d. False fronts;

e. "Stuck on" mansard roofs;

f. Materials with high maintenance (such as stained wood, shingles or light gauge metal siding);

g. Mirror window glazing;

h. Loading doors facing the street; and

i. Exposed roof drains.

10. Where industrial development abuts non-industrial uses, appropriate buffering techniques shall be employed such as setbacks, screening landscaping, or some combination of these.

11. An industrial site shall accommodate all of its required parking on-site without the use of on-street parking.

12. On-site circulation shall be designed to provide safe and efficient access for delivery vehicles, visitors and employees, and pedestrians.

13. Loading and delivery areas shall be clearly marked with directional signage where multiple access points are provided.

14. Loading areas shall be designed to accommodate trucks without them having to back onto or otherwise use the adjoining street when feasible.

15. When security fencing is required, it should be a combination of solid pillars, or short solid wall segments, wrought iron grillwork and not include barbed wire.

16. Priority should be given to development in the downtown.

17. New development should conform to the Redevelopment Agency's Art-Deco theme design guidelines.