



SECTION 8

Community Design & Application Review

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SECTION 8

Community Design & Application Review



REVIEWING PROJECT APPLICATIONS

As you review project applications, you will be evaluating the project's design and fit with the surrounding community. Good design is part art and part science. It might be called the process of connecting form and structure to build community. Thought of in this way, design is more than just determining whether a particular building is aesthetically attractive. It is also contextual: does the proposed use build community? How does the project relate to its surrounding environment? What should the community look like? Are there community needs that are not being met?

Over time, you will see your community less as a collection of buildings and streets and more as an interwoven fabric of forms and uses that shapes lives.

This big picture perspective is precisely what you are asked to provide as a planning commissioner. Owners, architects, builders, and neighbors often have their own interests in mind in the development process. Your role is to assure that long-term community needs are addressed as well. Remember, your community will still be living with the activity and architecture at a project site long after the owner has developed and sold the property.

The challenge is to incorporate big picture concepts into the weekly or monthly act of ruling on individual project applications. Long-term community goals must also be balanced against economic, legal, safety, and political concerns. For example, you may suggest a narrower street design to create a more compact feel in a planned neighborhood, only to find that the fire marshal wants extra-wide streets to assure that emergency vehicles can get through in any situation. All of these are valid concerns, which makes your role challenging to say the least. Yet it is the sum of these incremental decisions, the ones made day after day, that will ultimately shape the future of your community.

A PRIMER: 10 BASIC ELEMENTS OF COMMUNITY DESIGN

Any discussion about “good” design soon evokes intangible phrases like “sense of place” or “quality of life.” These things are difficult to define, although you may already have an idea of what they mean to you. A



Want To Learn More?

Continuing to learn about urban design will influence how you think about your surroundings. You might consider inviting a panel of architects and designers to a forum on how urban design has shaped, or might shape, your community. Discussion can lead to a better understanding of the role design plays in shaping communities and ways to encourage good design.

thorough treatment of urban design is beyond the scope of this book. However, you may find it useful to understand some of the main themes that architects, planners, and developers often discuss. The following ten principles¹ are by no means exhaustive, but provide you with a starting point to begin the discussion of what constitutes “good” design.

- **Build to Human Scale.** Good urban design is people-oriented. This concept is often expressed as “pedestrian friendly” and “built to human scale.” Buildings, streets, and open spaces should add to the experience of the individual. People like places where they can walk comfortably, admire a view, get a cup of coffee, see interesting buildings, meet a friend, or just people-watch. Large buildings with long, unbroken walls create dead spaces that people tend to avoid. Architectural features—like windows, doorways, balconies, and cornices—assure that buildings relate to the pedestrian. A traditional retail block, for example, may have four or five stores at a scale that is inviting to shoppers and passers-by. New development can create additional spaces—like small plazas or landscaped walkways—between buildings and wider sidewalks to accommodate outdoor cafes and other seasonal uses.
- **Design for Comfort and Safety.** To enjoy a space, people need to feel comfortable and secure. Architecture that isolates people—long, narrow passageways, for example—creates a feeling of insecurity. Amenities like good walking surfaces, shelter, shade, and interesting things to look at add to comfort. People feel more secure when they can see—and be seen by—other pedestrians. This is sometimes referred to as “eyes on the street” design. A good way to test whether a place will be physically comfortable is to ask yourself whether you would enjoy being there.
- **Create Places to Congregate.** Places where people congregate should offer a variety of activities. Choice makes a place more interesting. For example, shopping areas are a natural collection point. People will enjoy the space more if they can also sit outside, walk, meet a friend, or order a meal in the same area. Good design provides such choices in order to create and encourage neighborhood energy and vitality.
- **Assure Circulation and Accessibility.** Assuring circulation and accessibility involves creating safe, efficient passageways for cars, pedestrians, and other transportation options. Excessively wide streets, intermittent sidewalks, and poor circulation plans can create confusion for pedestrians and increase the chance of accidents. Creating separate paths for different uses can increase safety. In many cases, simple devices—like curbs and landscaping—assure this separation. Separate pathways can connect areas in ways that roadways often cannot. Many communities supplement walking, biking and driving options with public transit such as light rail and bus lines.
- **Mark Transitions and Boundaries.** Most people like to know where one neighborhood ends and another begins. A logical world with good spatial definition orients people. Transitions can tell people when they leave and enter town, what is public and private, where to sit and meet, where to stroll, and where to drive. Many towns are already informally divided into districts or neighborhoods based on existing landmarks. Reinforcing these boundaries—or creating new ones—provides a sense of order. The design of a neighborhood suggests what types of activities will take place there. Variations in building shape, doorway design, paving materials, curbs, landscaping, street

¹ Many of these principles were distilled from *Planning Commissioner Journal Reprints: Design & Aesthetics*. For more information, see www.plannersweb.com.

furniture, elevation, and signage let people know where one area or neighborhood gives way to another.

- Connect Streets and Sidewalks to Buildings.** Buildings are usually designed to serve the needs of the occupants. However, unless buildings are also oriented to the outside, they will not serve the needs of the community. Small setbacks, interesting doorways and porches, and large windows can help create vital neighborhoods with lots of eyes on the street, which increases safety. Large display windows, detailed architectural designs, and parking lots placed behind buildings allow commercial activities to “spill” out onto the sidewalk. An active interface between building and street creates vibrant areas that people want to visit.
- Add Detail and Variety.** Most people prefer a degree of aesthetic complexity and variety. Murals, attractive sidewalk designs, and the occasional fountain make public spaces more interesting. Architectural differentiations in materials, textures, roof shape, trim, and size also create variety. Monotonous facades symbolize institutionalism. To avoid this perception, make sure facades are broken into smaller units with varying shapes, sizes, windows, textures, colors, and perhaps even balconies.
- Provide Cohesion and Balance.** Encourage architectural compatibility to increase the feeling of interconnection. New buildings should reflect, but not exactly replicate, the design and scale of existing buildings. Building height, size, roof shape, doorways, and materials are all design elements that can be made compatible without stamping out originality. Repeating small but obvious elements—like signage, lampposts, and curbs—on a neighborhood or district level also creates cohesion.
- Stay True to Function.** Great design will not make up for poor function. Buildings and design must serve their purpose. People must be able to work, shop, and move efficiently through buildings and surrounding areas. For example, a project that relies on heavy pedestrian traffic should have wide sidewalks and places for people to rest. Overlooking these features may endanger the underlying economic purposes of



Yesterday and Today

In this excerpt from his book *The Great Good Place*, Ray Oldenburg describes how changes in urban design contributed to the decline of a once vibrant downtown. Oldenburg, a sociology professor at the University of West Florida in Pensacola, argues that a community’s social vitality suffers without “third places” where people can gather to enjoy one another’s company apart from work and home.²

In River Park [in 1940] informal socializing spilled out into the street and into places of commerce... The more gregarious or less busy citizen might take an hour to negotiate one block of Main Street, for there were always a good many people walking or lounging along it during daylight hours... The old-timers liked nothing better than to talk with the more active people of the community and keep up on things.

If one were to visit River Park today, one would see quite a different place... The people are largely gone from the street now, as are the physical amenities that earlier accommodated them.

The architecture of Main Street has changed noticeably. The earlier storefronts featured large windows and the majority of them had outdoor seating, in most cases integral to their architecture. Wide steps and Kasota stone slabs that flanked the entrances were heavily used by those who found them cool places to sit in the summer... Large windows and the encouragement to lounge at the portals combined to unify indoors and out and to encourage a ‘life on the street’ as well. That outdoor seating is all but gone now. The new storefronts are tight against the street and their much smaller windows allow little seeing in or seeing out.

² Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place* (Paragon House, 1989), reprinted in *Planning Commissioner Journal Reprints: Design & Aesthetics* (p. 5).

THE AHWAHNEE PRINCIPLES

In 1991, a group of highly acclaimed leaders in land use planning and architecture came together to develop a set of forward-looking principles for new development. These principles were then presented to about 100 local elected officials at a conference at the Ahwahnee Hotel in Yosemite National Park. There they received both an enthusiastic response and their title: the Ahwahnee Principles.

Preamble:

Existing patterns of urban and suburban development seriously impair our quality of life. The symptoms are: more congestion and air pollution resulting from our increased dependence on automobiles, the loss of precious open space, the need for costly improvements to roads and public services, the inequitable distribution of economic resources, and the loss of a sense of community. By drawing upon the best from the past and the present, we can plan communities that will more successfully serve the needs of those who live and work within them. Such planning should adhere to certain fundamental principles.

Community Principles:

- All planning should be in the form of complete and integrated communities containing housing, shops, work places, schools, parks and civic facilities essential to the daily life of the residents.
- Community size should be designed so that housing, jobs, daily needs and other activities are within easy walking distance of each other.
- As many activities as possible should be located within easy walking distance of transit stops.
- A community should contain a diversity of housing types to enable citizens from a wide range of economic levels and age groups to live within its boundaries.
- Businesses within the community should provide a range of job types for the community's residents.
- The location and character of the community should be consistent with a larger transit network.
- The community should have a center focus that combines commercial, civic, cultural and recreational uses.
- The community should contain an ample supply of specialized open space in the form of squares, greens and parks whose frequent use is encouraged through placement and design.
- Public spaces should be designed to encourage the attention and presence of people at all hours of the day and night.
- Each community or cluster of communities should have a well-defined edge, such as agricultural greenbelts or wildlife corridors, permanently protected from development.
- Streets, pedestrian paths and bike paths should contribute to a system of fully-connected and interesting routes to all destinations. Their design should encourage pedestrian and bicycle use by being small and spatially defined by buildings, trees and lighting; and by discouraging high speed traffic.
- Wherever possible, the natural terrain, drainage and vegetation of the community should be preserved with superior examples contained within parks or greenbelts.
- The community design should help conserve resources and minimize waste.
- Communities should provide for the efficient use of water through the use of natural drainage, drought tolerant landscaping and recycling.
- The street orientation, the placement of buildings and the use of shading should contribute to the energy efficiency of the community.

THE AHWAHNEE PRINCIPLES, *Continued*

Regional Principles:

- The regional land-use planning structure should be integrated within a larger transportation network built around transit rather than freeways.
- Regions should be bounded by and provide a continuous system of greenbelt/wildlife corridors to be determined by natural conditions.
- Regional institutions and services (government, stadiums, museums, etc.) should be located in the urban core.
- Materials and methods of construction should be specific to the region, exhibiting a continuity of history and culture and compatibility with the climate to encourage the development of local character and community identity.

Implementation Principles:

- The general plan should be updated to incorporate the above principles.
- Rather than allowing developer-initiated, piecemeal development, local governments should take charge of the planning process. General plans should designate where new growth, infill or redevelopment will be allowed to occur.
- Prior to any development, a specific plan should be prepared based on these planning principles.
- Plans should be developed through an open process and participants in the process should be provided visual models of all planning proposals.

the project. Urban design involves incorporating the functional needs of the project and society into the physical appearance of the urban environment.

- **Mix It Up.** One of the more exciting developments in recent years is the willingness of architects and developers to create mixed-use projects. Such projects provide a combination of housing, office, retail, and (sometimes) open space. This compact development pattern assures that there is activity around the property during the day and the evening—and provides new places for people to meet and congregate. At the same time, the proximity of people to multiple uses decreases dependence on cars.

These principles provide only a starting point. The field of urban planning and design is broad. You will likely learn more about good design as your term on the commission continues. Another way to gain more insight is to think about the places you like to go—shopping areas, neighborhoods, other cities, etc.—and note what makes them work.

THE TYPICAL APPLICATION

The typical development application comes in many forms. Planning commissioners may review tentative or parcel maps, planned unit developments, building permits, conditional use permits, certain types of variances, design review permits, development agreements, and possibly other things. The agenda for any given meeting may require you to review an addition to a single-family residence one minute and a complex mixed-use or multifamily development the next. The larger the project, the more factors—like circulation and grading—you will have to take into account. Even the smallest project is likely to raise a few unique issues. Your job is to make sure those issues are considered and addressed.

Planning commissioners are not usually responsible for assessing all of the technical merits of a development project. Staff will summarize the most important technical points in the staff report. Although you may not see (or need to see) all the information received by your planning staff, it may be helpful to know what type of information they use to evaluate a project. Each local agency maintains a detailed list of all information

needed from a project applicant, although most require the same basic information, including:³

- **Signed Application.** The applicant must sign the application.
- **Vicinity Map.** The vicinity map shows the general location of the project in relation to the neighborhood. Typically, the applicant is asked to submit a map of the area within a 300-foot radius of the project and a mailing list of property owners who must receive notice of the project. With new and expanding computer technology, some agencies are taking on this function as part of their service to project applicants.
- **Existing Facilities Map.** The existing facilities map shows all existing buildings, roads, walls, landscaping, signs, utilities, and easements on the property.
- **Site Plan.** The site plan provides a bird's eye view of the proposed project. The plan is drawn to scale (the same scale as the existing facilities map) and should be large enough to be easily discernable. Most agencies set a standard size for plans and may require reductions for distribution to the commission, governing body, and the public.

- **Grading Plan.** A grading and drainage plan shows the proposed topography at appropriate contour intervals. This information is frequently combined on a map or survey of existing topography.
- **Architectural Elevations.** Architectural elevations show all sides of all proposed structures on the site. Elevations should be shown unobstructed by proposed landscaping materials so that you can see entire buildings as they will be constructed, not necessarily as they may look in several years with mature landscaping.
- **Materials Board.** The materials board provides samples of all proposed building materials and their colors. The board should be cross-referenced with the architectural plans to make it easy to identify where each material will be used.
- **Landscape Plan.** The landscape plan shows the proposed groundcover, shrubbery, trees, and hardscape elements. It should indicate the size and types of proposed trees and show any existing trees to be retained on site.
- **Environmental Questionnaire.** The environmental questionnaire provides site-specific information

OTHER SPECIAL SUBMITTALS

Depending on the nature of the development, additional information may be needed for the project application, including:

- Traffic analysis reports
- Biological studies (endangered species)
- Utility reports (availability of water, sewer, electrical, drainage, etc.)
- Wall plans (if not supplied as part of landscape plans)
- Cross-sections of the site or buildings (these are helpful in understanding complex structures and in determining the adequacy of proposed screening techniques for outdoor storage and mechanical equipment)
- Phasing plan for large multi-phased projects
- Renderings (colored drawings or computer-enhanced pictures showing buildings as they will appear when finished, including landscaping, special features, signs, and the surrounding environment)
- Color photographs to help in visualizing the project site and the surrounding area
- Lighting plan
- Sign plan

³ Cal. Gov't Code § 65940.

necessary to assess whether or not the project could have a significant impact on the environment.

HOW TO REVIEW AN APPLICATION

A reviewer can get a basic understanding of a project by going through the following steps. The accompanying table—entitled Review Question Checklist (see next page)—provides a more detailed list.

- **Check the Scale of the Plans.** Understanding scale will help you get a feel for the actual size of the project. Check to see if the plans are drawn at $\frac{1}{4}$ " to 1'0 scale (one quarter inch on the plan equals one foot on the site), $\frac{1}{8}$ " to 1'0, or perhaps even $\frac{1}{30}$ " to 1'0 scale for very large projects. A good way to interpret plans on a human scale is to judge them in five- to six-foot increments to see how the scale matches the size of a typical person.
- **Compare to the General Plan and the Zoning Code.** Is the project consistent with the general plan and the zoning code? Look at the range of permitted uses, density, housing needs, building heights, circulation, environmental issues like habitat preservation and open space protection, etc. If the applicant seeks a zone change or general plan amendment, you may want to consider whether the project's benefits justify the change.
- **Compare the Vicinity Map and the Site Plan.** How does the proposed project fit in with the existing community? Is it compatible with surrounding properties and the street? Is there any relationship between adjacent buildings (both on and off the project site), such as pedestrian walks, window-to-window visual contact, noisy areas adjacent to quiet areas, or shadows cast over plaza areas? Can changes in the design address potential conflicts?
- **Determine If There Are Views Worth Protecting.** Would the project obstruct the view of a landscape or landmark? Is there a view of a feature on the site itself that should be protected? (It may help to visualize the site in various places to make this analysis). If so, does the site plan and architecture take these views into account?



- **Review Existing and Proposed Contours and the Grading Plan.** An outline of the building should be drawn on a topographical map. How much grading is proposed? Make sure that floor elevations and parking facilities will be graded to levels that are consistent with the landscaping plan. Make sure the floor elevations and parking lot grades are not so high that buffers such as landscaping would be ineffective.
- **Locate Existing Trees.** Will existing trees be removed? Can and should they be saved? Does the proposed landscaping include replacement trees?
- **Check the Circulation Pattern.** How easily can people reach the site by various modes of transportation? Check circulation elements for transit riders, cars, delivery vehicles, pedestrians, and bicycles. Are there points of conflict, such as walkways that would lead pedestrians through traffic or between cars?
- **Locate Landscaped Areas.** Do landscaped areas soften buildings, break up parking areas and long, blank portions of wall? Is the selection of plants and trees appropriate for the climate? Are planters large enough to accommodate desirable amounts of landscaping? Are there areas for special landscape and hardscape treatment? Do trees have enough space to grow and remain healthy without damaging sidewalks? Is there a maintenance system, such as drip irrigation?
- **Check the Materials and Architectural Elements.** Review the materials and architectural elements of the project. Do they incorporate features that are

Review Question Checklist

The answers to these questions will help you determine the overall value of a project and form the basis for your review. Of course, not all questions will apply to every project.

1	General
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Does the project further the goals of the general plan? <input type="checkbox"/> Are comfort needs—shade, seating, etc.—addressed? <input type="checkbox"/> Do buildings interact with the street? <input type="checkbox"/> Is the site oriented toward common areas to provide “eyes-on-the-street” security? <input type="checkbox"/> Are there community spaces to serve as social and design focal points? <input type="checkbox"/> Is the impact on environmentally critical areas—like steep slopes, wetlands, and stream corridors—minimized? <input type="checkbox"/> Does the project contribute to the development of complete, integrated neighborhoods? <input type="checkbox"/> Does the project add to a mix of uses in the neighborhood? <input type="checkbox"/> Does the project contribute to the efficient use of existing infrastructure? 	

2	Layout
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Are buildings laid out sensibly? <input type="checkbox"/> Is the site crowded, i.e. too much paving and building with too little landscaping? <input type="checkbox"/> Are buildings sited to consider shadows, climate, noise, and safety? <input type="checkbox"/> How does the project affect the privacy and views of neighboring properties? 	

3	Buildings & Architecture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Is the scale and mass of new structures compatible with (but not necessarily the same as) surrounding structures? <input type="checkbox"/> How does the scale of the buildings relate to the street? <input type="checkbox"/> Are the facades varied and interesting or flat and monotonous? <input type="checkbox"/> Are building facades carefully detailed, especially at the base; along cornices, eaves, and parapets; and around entries and windows? <input type="checkbox"/> What materials will be used? Are they high-quality, long-lasting materials like tile, stone, stucco, or wood? <input type="checkbox"/> Does roof design add to buildings and conceal roof-mounted equipment? 	

4	Topography
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Does the project “work” with the existing topography? Do buildings follow the natural contours of the land? <input type="checkbox"/> Will there be drainage problems? <input type="checkbox"/> Are there unsightly ditches, channels, or swales? Can they be aesthetically treated (natural) or undergrounded? <input type="checkbox"/> Can significant trees be saved by revising the grading around them? 	

5	Pedestrian Scale
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Is the site and building design comfortable and convenient? <input type="checkbox"/> What type of access is there to nearby transit stops, shopping, and parks? <input type="checkbox"/> Can a pedestrian access all major activities both on and off site? <input type="checkbox"/> Are the main entries clearly defined with covered porches or other pronounced architectural forms? <input type="checkbox"/> Do commercial buildings abut the street with parking located behind? <input type="checkbox"/> Do visible trash receptacles complement the architecture? <input type="checkbox"/> Is there variety and detail from the pedestrian perspective? <input type="checkbox"/> Are high-density areas supported by alternative forms of transportation? <input type="checkbox"/> Do pedestrians know their options (sit and relax, enter a building, walk quickly, stop and look, cross a road, etc.)? 	

6	Circulation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Does the project promote alternative transportation modes and help alleviate peak-hour traffic congestion? <input type="checkbox"/> Are transit stops accessible from the site? <input type="checkbox"/> Are entry and exit points safe with good sight distances? <input type="checkbox"/> How will a cyclist access the site? <input type="checkbox"/> Are street access points coordinated with median openings and access points on the opposite side of the street? <input type="checkbox"/> Have the number of driveways onto adjacent streets been minimized? <input type="checkbox"/> Are acceleration and deceleration lanes needed and provided on arterial streets? <input type="checkbox"/> Does the on-site circulation system make sense (no dead-end aisles, limited parking along main drives)? Is there a hierarchy of driveways from public streets to main drives to parking bays? <input type="checkbox"/> Is an adequate turning radius provided for large trucks and emergency equipment? <input type="checkbox"/> Is auto access for corner developments on side streets or on primary arterials? 	

Review Question Checklist, Continued

7	Conservation and Energy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Does the project endanger sensitive environmental resources? <input type="checkbox"/> Does the design of buildings and landscaping promote water conservation through choice of plants, materials, and irrigation systems? <input type="checkbox"/> Is outdoor solar lighting feasible? <input type="checkbox"/> Does the site plan reduce erosion and minimize impervious surfaces? <input type="checkbox"/> Does the project include energy-efficient heating and cooling systems, windows, appliances, and lighting? <input type="checkbox"/> Was selection of materials based on recyclability and durability? <input type="checkbox"/> Is the building oriented to maximize natural heating, cooling, and lighting? <input type="checkbox"/> Have the potential shading effects on adjacent properties been considered? 	
8	Housing (If Applicable)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Are there a variety of housing types, densities, prices, and rents? <input type="checkbox"/> Are there affordable units? <input type="checkbox"/> If the project includes higher-density units, are they organized around usable common space? 	
9	Parking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Are adequate spaces provided? <input type="checkbox"/> Does the number and location of disabled spaces make sense? <input type="checkbox"/> Do aisle widths meet standards or have they been oversized? <input type="checkbox"/> Are there paved areas that should be landscaped? <input type="checkbox"/> Are parking areas sited in the rear to minimize the visual impact of parked cars? <input type="checkbox"/> Is underground parking appropriate? 	
10	Buffering
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Is noise that might be created by traffic or air conditioning minimized? <input type="checkbox"/> Are loading areas and garbage disposal areas screened from view? <input type="checkbox"/> Will persons on surrounding properties be able to look down on storage, loading, or garbage areas? Can these views be mitigated? 	
11	Citizen Involvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Did the applicant get meaningful public participation from neighboring residents and the community as a whole? 	
12	Loading
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> What type of loading will occur? <input type="checkbox"/> Does the plan provide adequate maneuvering, loading, and drop-off areas? <input type="checkbox"/> Does the location of loading areas assure ease of delivery service with minimal conflicts with customers and adjacent properties? 	
13	Landscaping
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> How are focal areas—like site entrances, street corners, building entrance, plazas, and architectural elements—treated? <input type="checkbox"/> Are local conditions—like wind, drought, rain, and common plant diseases—taken into account? <input type="checkbox"/> Does the landscape plan complement the architecture? <input type="checkbox"/> Are planters large enough for their intended use and plant material? (Three-foot planters next to a five-story building are not sufficient.) <input type="checkbox"/> Are elements like landscaping, pavers, stamped concrete, benches, lighting, and fountains incorporated? 	
14	Lighting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Are night-lights aesthetically pleasing, compatible, and appropriately located? <input type="checkbox"/> Are walkways properly lit for safety? <input type="checkbox"/> Are lights used only for safety or does the plan allow for special lighting (floodlights, up or down lighting, spotlights) of signs, buildings, and landscape? <input type="checkbox"/> Will proposed lights shine onto adjacent property or buildings? 	
15	Signage
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Is your sign ordinance adequate or should there be a master sign program? (A special program is more likely needed for large, multi-tenant buildings). <input type="checkbox"/> Do business and project signs complement the architecture (style, color, size, materials, number)? Are they in proper scale to the site and buildings? <input type="checkbox"/> How are signs to be illuminated? 	

consistent throughout the neighborhood or district?
Do they create visual interest?

- **Review Conservation Practices.** Recycled and energy-efficient materials can reduce a project's impact on the environment. Does the builder intend to use recycled materials? Is the project designed to minimize runoff (particularly from parking areas)? Are energy-efficient materials—like windows and heating and cooling systems—included in the plan? Are trees and landscaping used to minimize energy consumption and heat generation?
- **Check the Parking Layout.** Do the aisles relate well to entry-exit points? Is there a logical pattern for cars to follow? Is there sufficient landscaping to screen parking from view or to break up expanses of asphalt? If the project site fronts a pedestrian area, is the parking tucked behind the building to create a more vibrant streetscape?
- **Think About the Future.** What is likely to happen on adjacent undeveloped property? Does the project anticipate likely changes or is it adaptable? For phased projects, make sure that the first phase will stand by itself in case the next phase is never constructed.