

CITY-WIDE DESIGN GUIDELINES ADOPTED FOR THE 2025 FRESNO GENERAL PLAN:

I. SITE DESIGN

PURPOSE OF SITE DESIGN:

Promote the improvement of the visual and built environment

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. Site Design combines the three elements of development: 1) buildings; 2) parking and circulation; and 3) landscape and amenities. These aspects must be in proper balance.
2. Buildings shall be designed and sited so as to provide a strong functional relationship to the site and the neighborhood. Required side and rear yards should be utilized and should be integrated into the overall purposeful arrangement. Inaccessible yards and similar outdoor spaces which tend to encourage storage, gathering of trash, and weeds shall be avoided, unless approved by the Director.
3. Natural site amenities shall be recognized. Views, trees, creeks and similar features unique to the site should be preserved and incorporated into development proposals. Such features shall be considered as strong site design determinants. Disruption of existing natural features, particularly older trees, shall be minimized.
4. Building setbacks must relate to the character of the existing streetscape. Where existing streets have been widened, thereby changing setbacks, field analysis of setback needs should be required for new buildings.
5. Site designs shall not negatively impact the immediate environment of the site.
6. Separate vehicular and pedestrian circulation systems shall be provided for larger projects. Pedestrian access to residential developments generally shall not utilize driveways and pick-up areas. Pedestrian linkages between uses in commercial developments shall be emphasized, including distinct pedestrian access from parking areas in large commercial developments such as shopping centers.
7. Provision must be made for bicycles. Bicycle parking in residential developments should be on an all-weather surface and be located close to dwelling unit or residential development entrances. Bicycle parking shall be lockable.
8. On larger commercial sites such as shopping centers, a portion of the total building area shall be located at the street perimeter. Such siting, together with substantial landscape treatment, reinforces and strengthens the streetscape, and helps to screen off-street parking areas.
9. Common driveways, which provide vehicular access to more than one site, are encouraged.

10. Site development shall give consideration to solar access and/or energy efficiency.
11. The siting and orientation of buildings shall respond to the pedestrian and vehicular nature of the street. Buildings on streets of high pedestrian use (such as downtown) should face on, and be directly accessible from, the sidewalk., with minimal interruption by driveways or parking areas. Buildings on streets with heavy vehicular traffic, particularly those with no on-street parking, should provide a major entry for the off-street parking area.
12. Off-street parking facilities need to be located to the rear of sites. Street frontages should be devoted to building architecture and landscaping. Parking should be screened from the street with mounds, vegetative screening, low wall, fencing, or lowered parking grade. (Refer to III. LANDSCAPING, No. 15).
13. Screening and buffering, as well as good design, needs to be used to mitigate the effects of trash areas, storage areas, service yards, loading docks and ramps, electrical and other utility boxes, mechanical equipment, and other necessary but unsightly aspects.

II. BUILDING DESIGN

PURPOSE OF BUILDING DESIGN

Development shall improve the visual and built environment of the neighborhood and the City as a whole.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. No single theme is required in Fresno. Themes may be established for selected parts of the community. They are directed more toward standards of quality and compatibility than toward achieving a uniform appearance.
2. Architectural consistency should exist between all building elevations of a particular structure or complex of structures, including consistent use of materials. Façade treatments shall consistently encompass all building sides. “False” or “decorative” façade treatments shall be avoided. All elevations need not look alike; however, an overall architectural sense must occur.
3. Visible rooftops should be treated as building elevations. Such rooftops should be free of mechanical equipment “clutter” in situations where it may be visible from surrounding buildings or structures. Rooftop mechanical equipment is not prohibited, but its design and screening should be incorporated into building design. For example, HVAC non-transitional ducts shall be below the roof structure.

4. Mechanical equipment, including wall air conditioners, should be screened from public view. The design of mechanical equipment screening should be compatible with, and an integral element of, the building structure. Rooftop screening and other mechanical equipment screening should be a minimum of 12 inches higher than the equipment itself.
5. Add-on components such as utility meters, ladders, vent pipes and similar features need to be identified in site plans and not placed as an afterthought in full public view unless screened in an acceptable manner.
6. All proposed buildings or structures should be compatible with the neighborhood character. Building design, however, need not be unduly constrained or limited by structures on adjacent sites.
7. All buildings on the same site should have strong spatial and architectural relationships. When the first portion of a site area is to be developed, a concept plan shall be submitted for the entire site.
8. All building design should achieve a sense of human scale. Wall insets, balconies, window projections, etc. are examples of building elements which may help reduce the scale of larger buildings.
9. Materials should be relatively permanent, requiring minimum maintenance in order to avoid deterioration.
10. Building entries should be protected from the elements and should afford a “sense of entry” for the structure.
11. All designs should be responsive to energy consideration. When energy-conserving devices such as solar heat collector panels are utilized, such devices should be designed as visually integral parts of the structure.
12. Modified standards may be considered for temporary buildings or structures, which are guaranteed to be removed from the site within six (6) months.
13. Each phase of a phased development should be visually complete. Temporary barriers/walls should be painted and trimmed to compliment the permanent construction.
14. Where buildings are on the border between different uses, there needs to be an appropriate transition.
15. Standardized and corporate design elements must be modified to be consistent and integrated with the surrounding environment.
16. The design of fencing, trash enclosures, and similar accessory site elements should be compatible with the architecture of main buildings and should use a similar palette of materials.

17. Masonry walls and allowable chain link fences shall be designed to accept vegetation, to reduce monotony, and to prevent irregular or unsightly lines.

III. LANDSCAPING

PURPOSE OF LANDSCAPE:

Landscaping shall be used to improve aesthetics, to soften the harshness of the urban setting, and to create a pleasant human environment.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS:

1. All site development shall include landscaping, except where determined to be impossible by the Director.
2. Landscaping shall be designed to provide a strong relationship between the site, street frontage, and neighborhood.
3. There should be a consistency of landscape design through a development. All areas within a development need not be identical. Among other things, different landscape themes may be utilized in larger developments to delineate spaces, strengthen a sense of place, and to add movement. Such themes should be consistent within a site.
4. Landscape plans shall indicate all proposed site elements, such as outdoor lighting, signage, fencing, site furnishings, and other site elements.
5. Where possible, existing landscape elements should be incorporated and preserved. Healthy mature trees and tree groupings shall be preserved as design determinants. In sites with mature trees, the development plan, elevations, and landscape shall be required to protect existing trees. Mature trees on project sites shall be protected and preserved as per City of Fresno tree preservation standards.
6. Landscaping shall be incorporated into building and site design. Trellises, arbors, and multilevel type landscaping should be considered.
7. All projects, including exterior modifications, are subject to street tree requirements. Street trees shall meet City requirements.
8. Live plant material shall be used in all landscaped areas. Imitation vegetation is not acceptable.
9. Gravel, colored rock, bark, and similar materials may be used in conjunction with, but not instead of, living ground cover and vegetation. Brick, cobblestone, and wood can be integrated into pathways and edges where appropriate.

10. Public and employee parking areas shall be landscaped. Such landscaping shall include perimeter screening and interior shading as per City standards.
11. Automatic irrigation is required for all landscape areas; surface piping and tubing are not allowed.
12. Irrigation heads shall not overspray walks, buildings, fences, streets, etc.
13. All property owners shall maintain landscaping consistent with these guidelines.
14. Required setbacks for buildings and landscaping may be averaged, but not less than one-half of the required setback. Proposals for less than one-half of the required setbacks may be considered through a reduced-fee Variance application process.
15. Major street landscaping shall include all of the following:
 - Double-row, large-scale 20'-on-center tree canopies within public and private landscape areas (curb to end of landscape setback)
 - Screening of parking through eye-level (as seen from an automobile) design elements, including but not limited to landscaping, fences, artwork, water features, etc.
 - One hundred percent screening/blocking is not mandatory.
 - Green shall be emphasized: plant material, size, type, and location.
 - Project entry/gateways defining sense of place shall be emphasized.

IV. SIGNAGE

PURPOSE OF SIGNAGE:

Signs are intended to identify the location of a place or business or residential development.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. Sign information is to be limited to the identification of the business name and, when necessary, the business function and business logo. Product advertising shall not be permitted.
2. Signs should be simple and easy to read.

3. Signs are to be limited to the minimum necessary for the proper use of the site.
4. Signing and related graphics must relate to the overall building and site design. Signing considerations should be made during the building design stages so that signage and graphics are architecturally incorporated into those buildings.
5. Unusual architectural features (such as the “golden arches”) used as a logo shall be considered and reviewed as part of the sign proposal.
6. Use of individual letters for all signing is preferred and encouraged over cabinet signs. Where cabinet signs are utilized, such cabinets must be an integral design element of the building or structure.
7. Master sign programs shall be prepared for multiple-occupancy buildings.
8. Complete sign programs for entire buildings or building complexes should be included with the architectural review of a signing request for any portion of a multiple-occupancy building. This also applies to existing buildings without any sign program. A long-term sign program must be established.
9. The light source of externally illuminated signs should not be visible.
10. Murals shall be subject to sign review.