



SAN FRANCISCO

**AFFORDABLE HOUSING BONUS PROGRAM DESIGN GUIDELINES  
FOR 100% AFFORDABLE AND HOME-SF PROJECTS**





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# Introduction

Inviting and active ground floors, sidewalks and streets and high-quality design and construction enrich and enliven dense neighborhoods.

Above the first twenty feet, thoughtful small-scale adjustments can help larger-scale volumes that add significant housing complement existing neighborhood architectural character. In recognition that the projects utilizing the **Affordable Housing Bonus Program (AHBP)** will sometimes be taller or of differing mass than the surrounding context the AHBP Design Guidelines clarify how projects shall both maintain their size and adapt to their neighborhood context.

In order to ensure consistency with the intent of the Planning Code and, the General Plan, and construct high quality buildings, as well as provide project sponsors with guidance and predictability in forming their building proposals, the Planning Commission and City Agencies will use the following guidelines as an evaluating tool for specific project implementation.

- Four categories of **AHBP Specific Design Guidelines** clarify how projects shall both maintain their size and adapt to their neighborhood context. These categories consist of Tops of Buildings, Building Mass and Articulation, Ground Floors, and Historic Preservation.
- Because several portions of the AHBP program area, such as the neighborhood commercial districts, do not have design guidelines, design principles around massing, articulation, ground floor treatment and streets apply as well as these specifically noted to address additional height.
- Guidelines applicable to AHBP projects in historic districts ensure that projects will preserve material features of the District and be complementary and differentiated.

# Interface with Existing Design Guidelines

Generally, **AHBP** projects will be reviewed under existing guidelines, however in some cases, due to the specific goals of the bonus program, guidelines adopted in this program will supplement or supersede portions of them. These existing guidelines include the Residential Design Guidelines, the Draft Ground Floor Residential Design Guidelines and the forthcoming Urban Design Guidelines. The general principles and the related policies of these documents shall apply to **AHBP** projects. In cases where there is a discrepancy between the unique architectural attributes accessible through the **AHBP** and existing guidelines the **AHBP Specific Design Guidelines** shall apply.

# T Tops of Buildings

*As this program would result in projects that would have two- to three-story height increases above existing zoning, the following program-specific design principles shall apply.*

- T1. Sculpt tops of buildings to contribute to neighborhood quality.
- T2. Enliven Sidewalls
- T3. Express Exceptional and Complementary Architectural Character

**T**

## TOPS OF BUILDINGS

### 1. Sculpt tops of buildings to contribute to neighborhood quality.

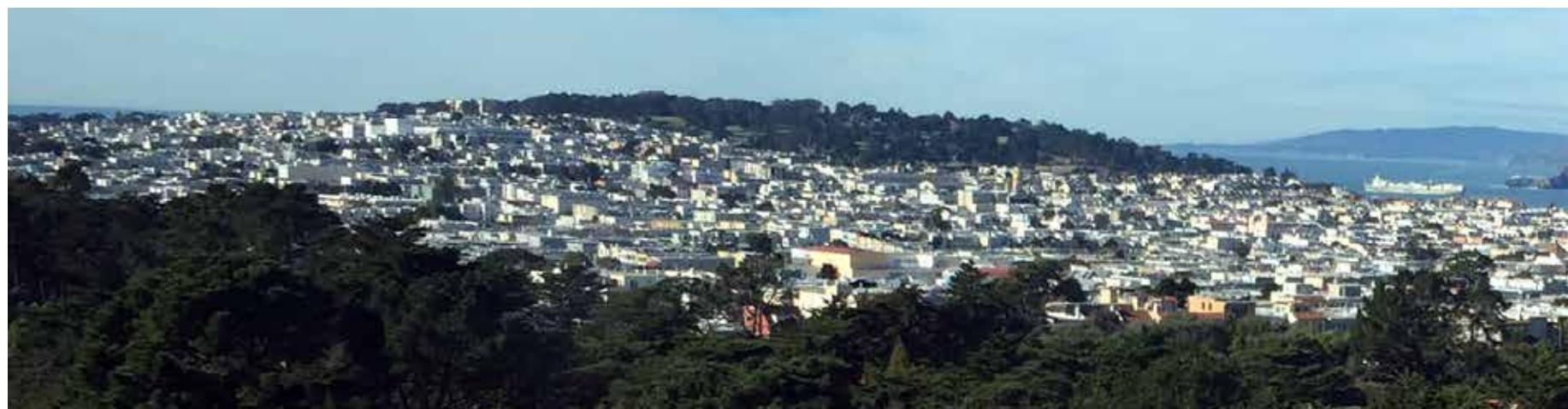
New buildings taking advantage of additional height offered by the AHBP should shall articulate building mass to most appropriately complement the surrounding neighborhood context. Significant reductions in building volume at the tops of buildings, however, are detrimental to achieving the housing

goals that are the basis of the AHBP and should be avoided. Instead, small to medium scale features, such as notches or bays, can contribute to the shaping of upper stories with minimal impact to floor area.

Building design elements should be selected and composed in a manner that assures – to the extent possible – that such projects are contextually compatible despite greater bulk than otherwise allowed.

### 2. Enliven Sidewalls

As some AHBP buildings will extend above existing height limits and thus be more vertically prominent than adjacent structures, their likely exposed sidewalls alongside property lines should be given special attention. Lightwells, decks, or balconies can help modify or sculpt the building volumetrically. Exposed surfaces can be given greater articulation by including planting or green walls, premium materials, fenestration, and/or art.



### 3. Express Exceptional and Complementary Architectural Character

While overall building mass may be larger for AHBP projects than adjacent ones, thoughtful design and fine-grain detailing with high-quality materials can provide patterns of visual interest to enhance the pedestrian experience. AHBP projects should elevate this aspect to enhance compatibility and design quality.



This can be achieved in a variety of ways, such as:

- » Window detailing or sun shading devices
- » Fenestration proportions or patterns
- » Variation in materiality or depth of materiality on visible facades
- » Fine-grain façade detailing
- » High-quality, durable materials, particularly at the building base and street level.
- » Contemporary reflections or interpretations of neighborhood design elements such as building termination, important datums, or base components.





# B

# Building Mass and Articulation

*Embodying important design principles that guide building mass and articulation, this section details guidelines to be applied to all AHBP projects.*

- B1. Most new buildings should be built to all property lines facing public rights-of-way.
- B2. Building façades should include three-dimensional detailing
- B3. The façades of new buildings should extend patterns.
- B4. Buildings on sloping sites should follow the slope to reinforce and accentuate the city's natural topography and maintain a strong relationship to the street.
- B5. High-quality building materials should be used on all visible façades and should include stone, masonry, ceramic tile, wood (as opposed to composite, fiber-cement based synthetic wood materials), precast concrete, and high-grade traditional "hard coat" stucco (as opposed to "synthetic stucco" that uses foam).

**B****BUILDING MASSING AND ARTICULATION**

1. Most new buildings should be built to all property lines facing public rights-of-way.



2. Building façades should include three-dimensional detailing

Facades may include bay windows, cornices, belt courses, window moldings, and reveals to create shadows and add interest. Fenestration systems should include significant depth, beyond three inches, and sliding windows or applied mullions should not be incorporated on windows facing the street or the public realm (streets, alleys and other publicly-accessible spaces). Windows and building termination features are especially important elements contributing to the creation of a comfortable “urban room” and pedestrian environment. Other façade elements that contribute to visual interest may include awnings, canopies, projections, trellises, and detailed parapets.

3. The façades of new buildings should extend patterns.

New building frontages should reflect the proportions and widths of neighborhood structures. This is ideally achieved through individual buildings on narrow frontages. On wider lots, vertical elements or massing breaks should break down the visual scale of larger buildings and create a rhythm that visually minimizes overall massing, consistent with historic development patterns.



**4. Buildings on sloping sites should follow the slope to reinforce and accentuate the city's natural topography and maintain a strong relationship to the street.**

One of the qualities most revered in San Francisco is streets and buildings that rise and fall with topography. New buildings or additions should follow the slope of the street to accent and celebrate the natural topography and provide a vertical rhythm to the street. Where buildings fail to step up slopes, they adversely "flatten" the city's natural topography.



**5. High-quality building materials should be used on all visible façades and should include stone, masonry, ceramic tile, wood (as opposed to composite, fiber-cement based synthetic wood materials), precast concrete, and high-grade traditional "hard coat" stucco (as opposed to "synthetic stucco" that uses foam).**



Rich architectural detailing on individual buildings significantly contributes to the public realm. Detailing is encouraged to provide interest and create variation in wall planes; materials and level of detail should be drawn from the best examples in the area. Base and cornice materials should be balanced in material and color.





# G Ground Floors

*To support a high-quality pedestrian environment, this section details guidelines to improve the activation and design quality of ground floor uses to be applied to all AHBP projects.*

- G1. Create a gracious, well-defined ground floor.
- G2. Surface parking should not be permitted between the street facing property line and the fronts of buildings in most instances.
- G3. No more than 30 percent of the width of the ground floor may be devoted to garage entries or blank walls.
- G4. Where present, retail frontages should occupy no less than 75 percent of a building frontage at the ground floor.
- G5. Building entries and shop fronts should add to the character of the street by being clearly identifiable and inviting.
- G6. Building projections and recesses, along with variations in materials and color and other architectural design features, should be used to emphasize pedestrian entries and de-emphasize garage doors and parking.
- G7. Residential units on the first (to third) floor(s) should generally be directly and independently accessible from the sidewalk, rather than from common lobbies.
- G8. For buildings on slopes, the ground floor and building entries should step-up in proportion to the slope between façade segments. Ground floor retail use should be directly accessible from the street at the grade of the sidewalk onto which it fronts.

**G**

## GROUND FLOORS

### 1. Create a gracious, well-defined ground floor.

Generous ground floor heights are crucial to ensuring flexibility, diversity, and activity at the level of the public realm. New construction projects shall strongly consider adding additional ground floor



height to make a gracious commercial ground floor, including heights from 10 to 15 feet.

Residential uses on the ground floor facing a public right-of-way or other publicly-accessible pathway should be elevated a minimum of 3' above the adjacent exterior sidewalk and connect directly to that right-of-way or pathway.

Projects must comply with the Draft Ground Floor Residential Design Guidelines which includes direction on stoops and landscape buffers.



### 2. Surface parking should not be permitted between the street facing property line and the fronts of buildings in most instances.

The use of setbacks for parking detracts greatly from the sidewalk character and pedestrian comfort. Parking should not be permitted at the front of buildings, except on parcels with 25 feet or less of frontage, where it is in a garage that is integrated into the structure of the building.



**3. No more than 30 percent of the width of the ground floor may be devoted to garage entries or blank walls.**

The building area immediately facing the street should support residential or commercial uses, have a human scale, and contribute active uses to the street. Large garage entries are extremely detrimental to a street's design character and pedestrian safety. Vehicular traffic crossing the sidewalk should be limited to the absolute minimum necessary to facilitate access to parcels. No façade may feature garage entries that together total more than 20 feet in width.

At least 70 percent of the width of the ground floor facing streets must be devoted to windows, entrances to dwelling units, store windows and entrances, landscaping or planters, and other architectural features that provide visual relief and interest.

**4. Where present, retail frontages should occupy no less than 75 percent of a building frontage at the ground floor.**

The interior of the retail space should be visible at pedestrian eye level to help activate the street. Retail spaces in the neighborhood typically provide ample transparency to the street. Businesses often use retail frontages to display goods and provide views to the interior. Dark or mirrored glass is not permitted. Solar consideration should be treated architecturally, through the use of recesses, eyebrows, or awnings.



**5. Building entries and shop fronts should add to the character of the street by being clearly identifiable and inviting.**

Blank walls (absent windows, entries, or ornamentation) should be avoided. Display windows with unobstructed views into interior spaces and building entrances should line major streets. Service functions such as trash, utility, or fire rooms, should not be placed at the street front where possible.



**6. Building projections and recesses, along with variations in materials and color and other architectural design features, should be used to emphasize pedestrian entries and de-emphasize garage doors and parking.**

**7. Residential units on the first [to third] floor(s) should generally be directly and independently accessible from the sidewalk, rather than from common lobbies.**

Individual entries to residential units help to provide rhythm to a building façade, contribute activity, interest, and “eyes” on the street, and enhance the sense of connectedness between residential units and the public life of the street.



**8. For buildings on slopes, the ground floor and building entries should step-up in proportion to the slope between façade segments. Ground floor retail use should be directly accessible from the street at the grade of the sidewalk onto which it fronts.**

Storefronts located above or below grade often feel removed from the life of the street and are notoriously difficult to make successful. Steps up or down should be avoided. On sloping sites, taller retail spaces at the low end of the site are preferable to sinking a portion of the retail floor below sidewalk grade.



# Historic District

*This section details guidelines applicable for AHBP projects located in historic districts.*

- H1. Design a site plan that is harmonious with the characteristics found within the district. Avoid unnecessary contrast with historic fabric in form or building articulation, to maintain the integrity and character of the site and its context.
- H2. Strengthen the primary characteristics of the district through infill construction by referencing and relating to the historic design, landscape, use, and cultural expressions found within the district.
- H3. Utilize character-defining features of the historic district to inspire the design.
- H4. Respect the historic and architectural features without duplicating historic styles or features that will create a false sense of history.
- H5. Design to be visually distinguishable to the historic district.
- H6. Design to be identifiable as contemporary and harmonious with the historic district in terms of general site characteristics, materials, and features.
- H7. Reference the size, proportion, rhythm and alignment of doors and windows found in the district to reinforce compatibility in the design.
- H8. Design roofs to fit within the historic context and integrated into the building's overall composition.
- H9. Select materials that are harmonious and referential to the general character, color, and textures of the historic district. Avoid contrast that detracts or visually competes with the historic district.

**H**

## HISTORIC DISTRICT

### APPLICABILITY

The Guidelines below apply to AHBP projects located within districts determined to be Historic Resources eligible for local, state or National registers. Infill construction shall preserve historic features, character, and spatial relationships. Recognizing that AHBP projects may be taller than existing buildings, the design of infill construction should be differentiated yet compatible within the overall district. Design differences between new and historic may be subtle but also must be legible.

In districts with uniform character, the design may require particularly subtle differentiation from the dominating character-defining features. In districts with mixed character, the design may define the character of the district by referencing significant features.

1. Design a site plan that is harmonious with the characteristics found within the district. Avoid unnecessary contrast with historic fabric in form or building articulation, to maintain the integrity and character of the site and its context.
2. Strengthen the primary characteristics of the district through infill construction by referencing and relating to the historic design, landscape, use, and cultural expressions found within the district.
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