



## RESIDENTIAL DESIGN REVIEW

### GENERAL PLANNING INFORMATION HANDOUT

JANUARY 2018

Pursuant to Planning Code Sections 311, the construction of new residential buildings and alteration of existing residential buildings in R Districts shall be consistent with the design policies and guidelines of the General Plan and with the “Residential Design Guidelines” as adopted and periodically amended for specific areas or conditions by the Planning Commission.

For questions, you can call 415.558.6377, email [pic@sfgov.org](mailto:pic@sfgov.org) or visit the Planning Information Center (PIC) at 1660 Mission Street, First Floor, San Francisco, where planners are available to assist you.

**Español:** Si desea esta información en español, llame a 415.575.9010. Tenga en cuenta que el Departamento de Planificación requerirá al menos un día hábil para responder

中文: 如果您需要中文信息, 請致電415.575.9010。請注意, 規劃部門需要至少一個工作日來回應。

**Tagalog:** Kung nais mo ang impormasyong ito sa Filipino, mangyaring tawagan ang 415.-575.9010. Mangyaring payagan ang Departamento ng Pagpapalano ng hindi bababa sa isang

### WHAT IS DESIGN REVIEW?

Planning Code Section 311 requires all projects with a residential use, located in an R-District, be reviewed for compliance with the Residential Design Guidelines (RDGs). Applications determined not to be in compliance shall be held until either the application is determined to be in compliance, is disapproved, or a recommendation for cancellation is sent to the Department of Building Inspection.

Planners and design review staff review projects for compliance with the guidelines and **provide recommendations about design changes necessary to comply with them.**

### WHAT ARE THE RESIDENTIAL DESIGN GUIDELINES?

The Residential Design Guidelines articulate expectations regarding the character of the built environment and are intended to promote design that will protect neighborhood character, enhancing the attractiveness and quality of life in the City. The Guidelines address basic principles of urban design that will result in residential development that maintains cohesive neighborhood identity, preserves historic resources, and enhances the unique setting and character of the City and its residential neighborhoods. The guidelines cover six topics:

- Neighborhood Character
- Site Design
- Building Scale and Form
- Architectural Features
- Building Details
- Special Guidelines for Alterations to Buildings of Potential Historic or Architectural Merit

Due to the impact the guidelines can have on the development or alteration of an existing building, the Planning Department advises applicants and their design teams to review the San Francisco Planning Code and the Residential Design Guidelines prior to beginning the programming and design process. The guidelines can significantly affect:

- Location of the built area on the site
- Location, shape, and access to open space
- Overall shape and size of the building envelope from the front, top, sides, or rear
- Facade proportions, materials, and features visible from the public realm
- Rooftop use and design of access elements
- Windows and light wells in how they relate to privacy and access to open space
- Front entry location, design, and inclusion of landscape elements
- Garage and parking design and dimensions

**The RDGs are available for download here:**

[http://default.sfplanning.org/publications\\_reports/residential\\_design\\_guidelines.pdf](http://default.sfplanning.org/publications_reports/residential_design_guidelines.pdf).

## **WHAT IS THE PROCESS?**

**Visit the Planning Information Center**

**Members of the public are encouraged to meet with Planning staff at the Planning Information Counter (PIC) to discuss the basic process for residential permitting; find out site information such as zoning, allowable height, applicable guidelines, and density limits; and identify sites that may contain a potential historic resource.**

**Project Review Meeting**

**Members of the public may meet with Planning staff to get early feedback on residential development proposals by requesting a Project Review Meeting. These meetings provide the public with an opportunity to discuss sites or project proposals in depth with the Department in advance of filing a building permit or entitlement application. These meetings are approximately 45 minutes.**

**Project applicants may also enhance the project review meeting option by asking for the participation of design review, historic preservation, environmental and/or long-range planning staff. Applicants may document the meeting and request confirmation of meeting content afterwards from attendees. Applicants are encouraged, but not required, to submit the following project documentation prior to the project review meeting, to enable staff to prepare in advance:**

- Site plan showing context of adjacent properties
- Existing and proposed floor plans or massing outlines of all floors showing context of adjacent properties
- Existing and proposed elevations or massing outlines of all sides showing context of adjacent properties
- 3D view from front of building or massing showing context of adjacent properties
- 3D view from rear of building or massing showing context of adjacent properties
- Sketch-up or .kml file of existing and proposed building or massing on thumb-drive

Project Review meeting forms can be downloaded here: [http://forms.sfplanning.org/ProjectReview\\_Application.pdf](http://forms.sfplanning.org/ProjectReview_Application.pdf).

### **Site Permit or Entitlement Review**

When a project sponsor submits a project for site permit or entitlement, the case is assigned to a planner who will review it for compliance with the RDGs, in addition to environmental review and zoning. The planner will then provide feedback to the sponsor with recommendations if it is found out of compliance with the RDGs. If the proposal consists of new construction or a vertical addition, the planner will schedule it to be reviewed by the Residential Design Advisory Team (RDAT). The planner will re-assess revisions until the project is in compliance, disapproved, or the application is cancelled or withdrawn.

### **Residential Design Advisory Team (RDAT)**

The Residential Design Advisory Team (RDAT) is a Planning Department staff advisory body that supports the Current Planning Division and ensures that development projects comply with the RDGs. RDAT consists of senior planners, historic preservation planners, and design review staff (including licensed architects) who review projects to ensure compliance consistency. RDAT meetings are not public, but all of RDAT's comments are documented and available to the public.

Projects will return to RDAT if there are substantial change in the design or massing, remains significantly out of compliance, or if a Discretionary Review is filed during the public notification process. Compliance for smaller issues or revisions that substantially meet the RDAT recommendations will be managed by the staff planner with support from design review staff during their office hours.

### **Post-RDAT Meeting**

After projects receive RDAT comments, project applicants may request a post-RDAT meeting to discuss the feedback with the assigned staff planner and design review staff. This meeting is intended to be a collaborative way for the project applicant to provide further clarification, suggested alternatives, or make revisions to address RDAT concerns. Design review staff may revise RDAT recommendations if new information is presented that clarifies the project's compliance with the RDGs.

### **Role of Design Review Staff**

The Planning Department has a group of architects on staff who support the design review process and serve on RDAT. They work daily with planners, project applicants and their teams, and provide expertise in architectural design, neighborhood compatibility, and the development, use, and interpretation of design guidelines.

## **HOW IS THE PROCESS DOCUMENTED?**

### **RDG Matrix**

At each phase of the design review process for a project that requires RDAT review, compliance with the Residential Design Guidelines is documented by planning staff in an RDG Matrix. This Matrix is established at the first review of the project by Planning staff and will serve as a record of RDG compliance.

The RDG Matrix sequentially lists the individual guidelines on the left side of the document. At each review and response step, a staff planner or design review staff will complete a new column to indicate what guidelines have been met, which are indeterminate, what has been modified, and what needs to be revised to come into compliance. At each step in the review process, the Matrix stands as public documentation of the process to-date and will be included in a staff report should the project require presentation at the Planning Commission.



## San Francisco Planning

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

Call or visit San Francisco  
Planning

**Central Reception**

1650 Mission Street, Suite 400  
San Francisco CA 94103-2479

TEL: **415.558.6378**

FAX: **415.558.6409**

WEB: **<http://www.sfplanning.org>**

**Planning Information Center (PIC)**

1660 Mission Street, First Floor  
San Francisco CA 94103-2479

TEL: **415.558.6377**

Planning staff are available by phone and at  
the PIC counter.  
No appointment is necessary.