City of Larkspur

Planning Department

Design Guidelines and Submittal Requirements for Single Family Dwellings

April 2008

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SECTION I
Introduction

A primary land use goal of the Larkspur General Plan is to maintain existing neighborhood scale by limiting visual bulk of houses so that they fit in with neighboring homes and the physical setting. Further, each of Larkspur's neighborhoods has a distinct character, which derives from its period of development and/or natural setting, and each individual design proposal should be compatible with and reflect the scale and streetscape of the existing neighborhood in which it is proposed.

These guidelines are provided to assist applicants, staff and the Planning Commission in retaining and enhancing the special qualities of Larkspur's varied neighborhoods. Design Review enables the City to evaluate project proposals to ensure that the design and scale of the addition(s) or new structure are consistent with the patterns of development already established within the City's residential areas.

A. Applicability

These guidelines are provided to assist all applicants planning to construct within the City of Larkspur. Refer to Appendix 1 of these Guidelines or to Larkspur Municipal Code (LMC) Section 18.64.020, for a complete list of projects requiring review by the Planning Commission or the Zoning Administrator.

B. Purpose

Chapter 18 of the LMC governs such design aspects as floor area ratios (FAR), building height, and setbacks. Within the zoning limitations, however, there are many possible ways to design a new house, an addition, or a remodel of an existing house, and these design guidelines are intended to:

1. Provide a guide for the homeowner, architect, designer, developer, and builder to encourage projects that are compatible in size and design with the natural landscape and the surrounding neighborhood, and which will retain the community character of Larkspur's neighborhoods.
2. Provide a consistent foundation from which the public, City staff, and the Planning Commission and City Council can evaluate a project.
3. Ensure the preservation, protection and enhancement of the City's historical, architectural, and aesthetic resources.
4. Encourage thoughtful planning and design that respects the privacy of neighbors.
5. Assist in streamlining the development review process by more clearly communicating community expectations to applicants.

C. Submittal Requirements

The submittal of accurate and complete drawings, along with adequate photographs of the site and surrounding neighborhood, is extremely important to the understanding of any project proposal. Inaccurate and incomplete materials will invariably lead to delays in the review process. The minimum submittal requirements are outlined below; additional information may be required depending on the application.

- Application-completed & signed by applicant & property owner. (Note: property owner may be different from applicant.)
- Deposit or fee as established by resolution of the Council.
- Statement of required findings under the Design Review ordinance- (Section 18.64.055, Larkspur Municipal Code [LMC]) describing how the application satisfies these findings. (See Appendix 2 for the Design Review Findings.)
- Green Building Certification Form demonstrating how the application satisfies Chapter 18.17 of the LMC.

- Three (3) sets of plans (up to an additional 8 plans will be required when the application is deemed complete) including the following:
  - ◊ Location map –showing the general location of the parcel & the addresses of adjacent properties.
  - ◊ Topographic & Boundary Survey- including calculations for the average slope of the property per LMC Section 18.34.030.
  - ◊ Site Plan shall–
    - a. Be drawn to scale & dimensioned.
    - b. Have a graphic bar scale, a statement of scale, a north arrow, title block & date.
    - c. Include parcel area calculations & applicable zoning requirements.
    - d. Show all treated portions of the lot (e.g., walkways, stairs, pools, hot tubs, patios, decks & paved driveways etc.), the main structure & any accessory structures on the site. Include labels identifying the improvement and distinguishing existing and new (proposed) construction.
    - e. Show adjacent building walls of neighboring structures along abutting lot lines.
    - f. Depict any existing and proposed landscaping.
    - g. Show existing and proposed setbacks.
- Building Floor Plans and Sections – showing existing floor area & proposed floor area at 1'=1/4" scale. Both shall be dimensioned at exterior walls.
- Architectural Elevations- showing existing and proposed materials & colors at 1/4" = 1' scale, typical building details affecting exterior appearance (e.g., window sills and jambs), and building heights.
- Roof Plan (existing and proposed).
- Table listing existing & proposed: floor area (including garages, carports, and covered porches) broken down by story level and total floor area, floor area ratio (FAR), lot coverage, lot area, average slope, and natural state. Note: see definition of "Gross Floor Area," Story," "Height" & "Enclosed Structure" in Chapter 18.08 "Definitions" in the LMC.
- Story Pole Plan- see Story Pole Requirements handout.
- Demolition Plan- indicating walls to be removed, walls to remain & new walls.
- Elevation photographs of all other homes along both sides of the parcel's block face or within a reasonable distance keyed to an Assessor's Parcel Map.
- Composite, to-scale drawing of proposed front elevations and those of the existing homes on either side.
- Photographs taken in the direction of immediately adjacent homes to the side and rear of the parcel.

D. Community Expectations

Design review involves a balancing of the needs and expectations of the applicant with those of the surrounding neighbors, many of whom have likely lived in the neighborhood for many years, have made substantial investments in their homes, and have developed an understandable attachment to the surrounding visual qualities that comprise their neighborhood. The first step expected of any applicant is that they attempt to see the neighborhood as the current residents see it and to understand the architectural and natural elements that are important in determining and maintaining the unique character and scale of that neighborhood. The applicant is encouraged to meet with neighbors about their design plans during the preliminary design stages so that potential problems and issues might be resolved early on.

Applicants should also meet with City Planning Department staff to acquire information about the City's development standards and requirements. Once a preliminary design proposal has been prepared, the applicant is encouraged to again meet with staff to determine if there are any immediately apparent problems with the design.

The importance of retaining the community character of Larkspur's neighborhoods is clearly described in the Larkspur General Plan Community Character Element. Larkspur's neighborhoods vary significantly from the older tracts of Baltimore Park and Heather Gardens, to the densely wooded areas of Murray Park and Madrone Canyon and its surroundings, to the relatively newer developments on Palm Hill, in Greenbrae and along Doherty Drive. A description of Larkspur's neighborhoods can be found in Appendix B of the Larkspur General Plan (also included as Appendix 3 to these Design Guidelines) and in the book entitled *Larkspur Past & Present,* published by the Larkspur Heritage Committee.

The natural setting, the pattern of lot subdivision, and the dominant period of development establish the defining characteristics of each of Larkspur's neighborhoods. Neighborhood character is often apparent through observable patterns, such as:

- front yard setbacks, fencing and landscaping
- garage location, size and treatment
- roof types, orientation, slopes, eave heights, and over hangs,
- building heights,
- second floor size and placement
- entry treatment and scale
- exterior wall complexity
- window types, size, and proportions
- exterior building materials

The community expects to see new development respect the qualities that make the neighborhood unique and to see care taken in the siting and design of new homes and additions. Though new homes tend to be larger than the older vintage homes of the neighborhood they should be designed so as not to overwhelm the neighborhood or be at great odds with the scale and bulk of other nearby homes. The fact that one or more homes of a different scale and character have been constructed in the past, often before design review, does not negate the need and desirability of relating new homes to the majority of homes nearby. Further, where streetscape components are similar or compatible in appearance, they contribute to and provide a cohesive sense of neighborhood character. These features should not necessarily be copied but should be respected to avoid new construction that detracts from the neighborhood.

SECTION II
Neighborhood Character and Streetscape

NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

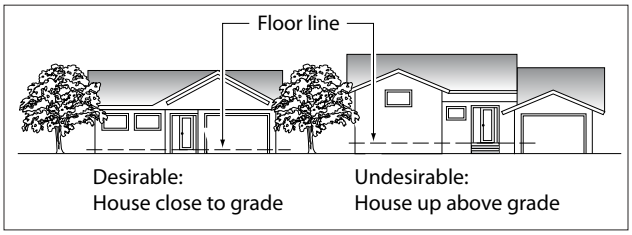
Design Goals

1. Complement the existing scale, massing, and orientation of homes in the neighborhood.
2. Create and maintain a pedestrian friendly environment that respects the architectural and natural character of existing developed neighborhoods.

Design Guidelines

- Incorporate historic and natural features of the neighborhood with an emphasis on pedestrian friendly design.
- Incorporate architectural details (e.g., roof forms, siding materials, doors, etc.) of homes located on or near the project that reflect the scale and pattern in the neighborhood.

- Incorporate finished floor heights typical of that seen in the neighborhood (except where flood elevations may require a higher floor elevation).



- Step down and minimize building height toward the street and neighboring smaller structures.
- Avoid removal of mature or native trees. See Chapter 12.16 of the Larkspur Municipal Code regarding heritage trees.
- Preserve and incorporate natural features, such as creeks, rock out-croppings or groves of trees into the site design.
- Enhance the identity of the neighborhood with landscaping; minimize paving.
- Planting of street trees is encouraged.

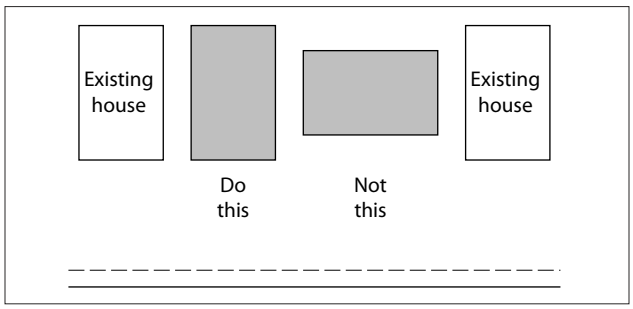
STREETSCAPE

Design Goals

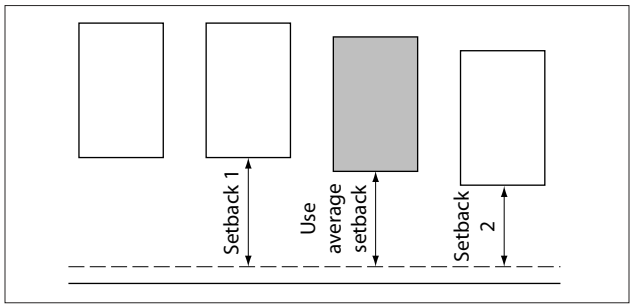
1. Develop projects that are sensitive to significant existing neighborhood patterns and/or characteristics.
2. Create a pleasant environment for everyone living in or passing through the neighborhood.
3. Create streetscapes with defined and enhanced front entrances where paving is minimized and landscaping is maximized.

Design Guidelines

- Front yards, particularly the interface between the property and the street edge, should emulate the neighborhood pattern and create a pleasant environment for everyone, from property owners to passers-by.



Relate building orientation to those of adjacent homes



Relate building setbacks to those of adjacent homes

- Existing patterns of setbacks, building orientations, fencing, and landscaping should be recognized and appropriately incorporated into any proposed design.
- Do not exceed the building facade width of a typical residential structure on adjacent lots.
- On a large lot, express facades as multiples of typical facade widths.
- Plant low shrubs and flowers, where necessary, to maintain visibility and safety for pedestrians and cars.
- Front entrances should be enhanced and defined as seen from the street.
- To the extent practicable, incorporate landscaped pathways to the main entry from the public right-of-way rather than just directly from the driveway.
- Consider use of decorative gates, trellises with climbing vines, or low hedges with openings to express a sense of "welcome."
- Plan the location of the driveway and curb cuts to avoid existing street trees and maximize available on-street parking.
- In traditionally developed neighborhoods, design and locate garages consistent with the prevalent neighborhood pattern.
- Place significant additions at the rear of the house or at the side, if setbacks allow.

SECTION III
Site Conditions and Planning

Construction on sloping land should be designed to work with the site's natural features, such as topography, vegetation, drainage, soil conditions, and vistas. Further, slope conditions can exaggerate height, bulk and mass; hence, new construction on sloping land should relate to existing landforms in order to minimize the building's mass and bulk (e.g., step with the slope) and its impact on the natural environment, particularly drainage on- and off-site. Insensitive development of a hillside site can negatively impact not only the project site, but also surrounding properties, particularly those located downhill and in the flatlands of the community. Refer to LMC Chapter 18.34 for regulations regarding slope and hillside development.

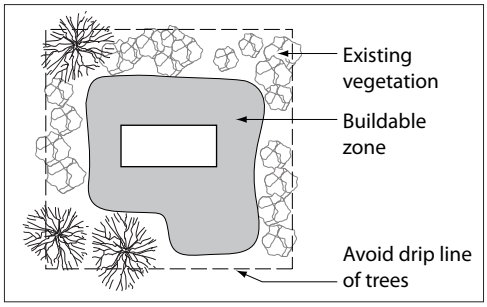
Design Goals

1. Preserve, protect, and restore significant site features in their natural state.
2. Locate improvements on the least sensitive areas of a site to avoid impacts on unique areas such as topographic (e.g., ridgelines) and hydrological resources (e.g., drainage channels).
3. Minimize grading and blend structures into their natural surroundings.
4. Accomodate existing and new drainage flows and patterns so adjacent and downhill properties as well as the project site are not impacted.

Design Guidelines

Vegetation and Landscaping

- Preserve and incorporate natural features, such as mature trees, natural vegetation, streams and rock outcroppings, into landscape designs.



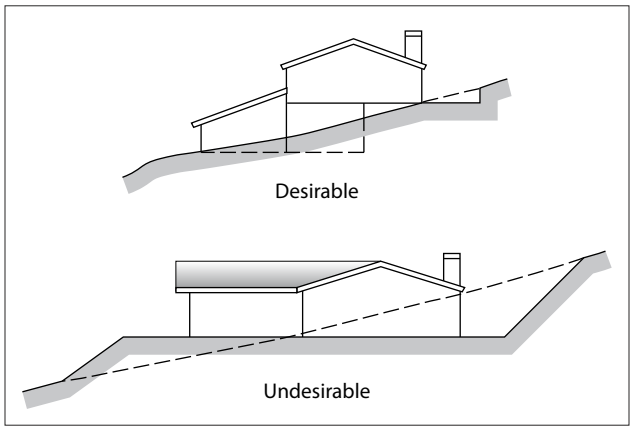
- Retain both young and heritage natives (e.g. oak, madrone, laurel, and redwood) wherever possible.
- Plant primarily native or adapted, drought resistant, and fire resistant plant species in new or replacement landscaping.
- Integrate vegetation and landscaping with fence and wall designs.

Drainage

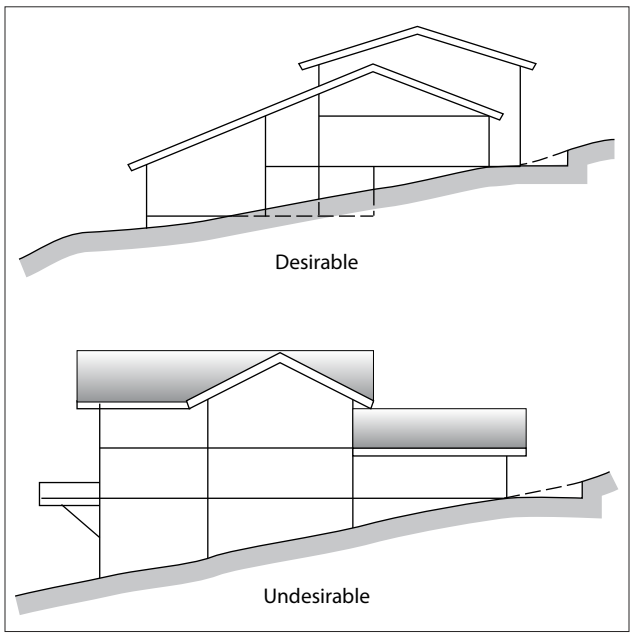
- Determine existing flow amounts and drainage patterns of a site at the beginning of the planning stages.
- Minimize paved and other impervious surfaces.
- Accommodate existing and new drainage patterns and flow that may result from the project.
- Preserve natural drainage courses as close as possible to their natural location and appearance.
- Design above ground drainage systems to serve as a water quality protection feature and work into the natural landforms and land uses as a major design element.
- Collect and convey stormwater from building roofs to a comprehensive site drainage system, which may include on-site dispersion.

Grading

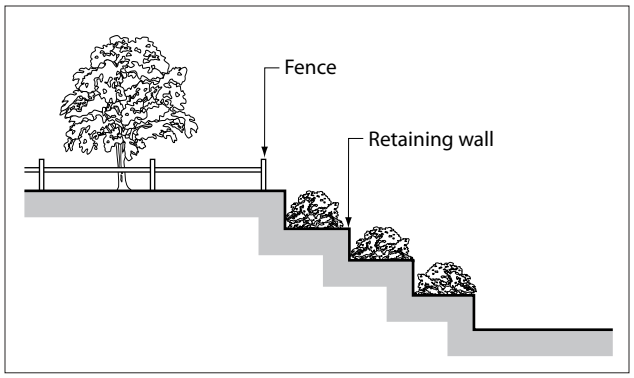
- Minimize grading and balance cut and fill.



- Avoid grading near all perimeter property lines.
- Design any grading plan in such a way as to protect natural features and blend visually with the site and adjacent properties.
- Step structures with the natural terrain.
- Design lower floors to be near grade.



- Minimize and balance cut and fill volumes.
- Avoid building in areas with excessive slope, soil with poor bearing capacity, high slide potential, or other hazards.
- Minimize graded pads for outdoor recreation areas. Development that necessitates grading of pads for yards, tennis courts, and swimming pools is generally considered inappropriate on hillside lots.
- Avoid expansive retaining walls and, where a high retaining wall is necessary, break the wall into terraces to reduce the overall height of a single wall.
- Design terracing with small incremental steps that conform to the natural hillside profile as much as possible.



- Locate garages and parking areas so as to minimize grading for driveways.

SECTION IV
House Design

The scale, roof form, and shape of new construction should be compatible with existing houses along the street and block. It should respect the neighborhood context with richness in texture, patterns and design elements found in traditional neighborhoods.

In terms of remodels and additions, it is often not feasible or desirable to expand the first floor of a dwelling in a neighborhood of single-story homes, and a second story is required. A second story addition that is stepped back from the front and sides of the lower floor makes the house appear smaller as seen from the street. Reductions in overall scale and height help a second story addition fit the neighborhood scale in a single-story neighborhood.

Design Goals

1. Design new homes and additions that meet the needs of the applicants and are in character with the neighborhood.
2. Minimize impacts of new homes and additions, particularly two-story homes and second story additions, on adjacent properties.
3. Do not impact prominent scenic views from significant living spaces in nearby homes.
4. Historic resources are preserved.

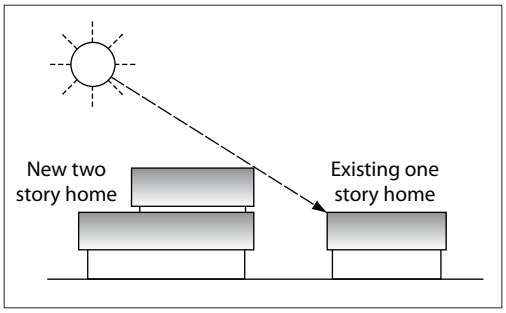
Design Guidelines

Garages

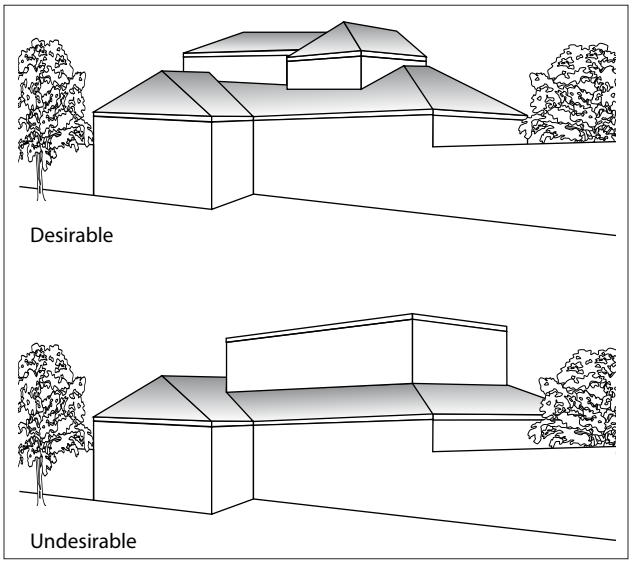
- Express multiple stall garages as single separate entities.
- Recess garage doors from the face of walls as much as possible when doors face a street.

Second Stories

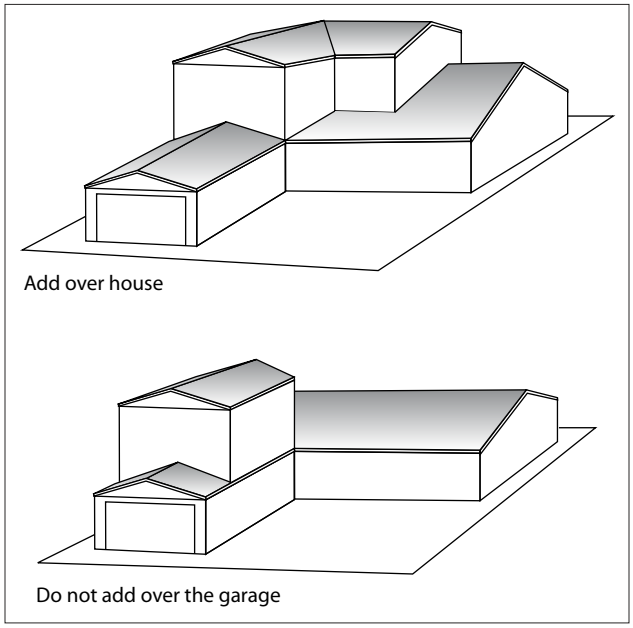
- Minimize areas of maximum height.
- Incorporate upper level setbacks into the design of the home to maintain adequate space, light and a sense of openness for all neighbors.



- Build a second story "within" the overall roof form and use dormers or bay projections as appropriate.



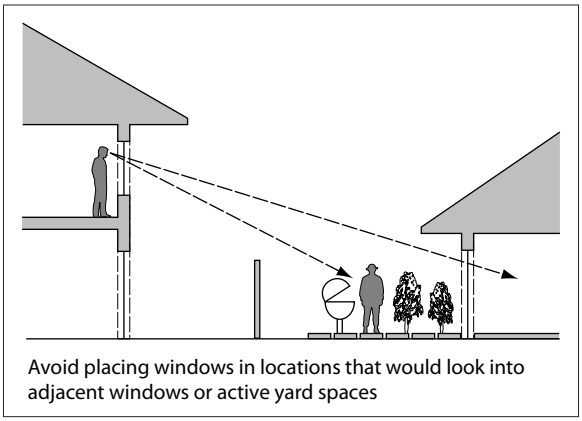
- Proportion second story additions to harmonize with the existing scale of the house. Moving a second story to the rear can help to make a house have more of a one-story appearance.



- Locate additions over the main living area of the house, not over the garage.
- Design second stories subordinate in scale so as not to project or overhang the first floor footprint.
- In two-story designs, use more than one material or color change on an elevation to help break up the vertical mass.
- Avoid long, flat wall planes along the entire side of a house.
- Avoid massive, tall chimneys.

Privacy and Views

- Stagger or alternate windows, or use clerestory windows, to prevent looking straight into a back yard or across into a neighboring room of an adjacent home.


Avoid placing windows in locations that would look into adjacent windows or active yard spaces

- Avoid impacting a neighbor's prominent scenic view, but where it cannot be avoided, the design should not result in a significant and unreasonable loss of a neighbor's prominent scenic view.

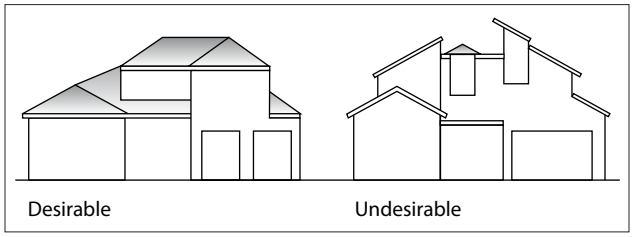
Lighting

- Direct exterior lighting downward and arrange to illuminate only your own property.
- Avoid glare onto neighboring properties and the street.
- Run exterior lighting at nighttime only; motion sensors are encouraged.

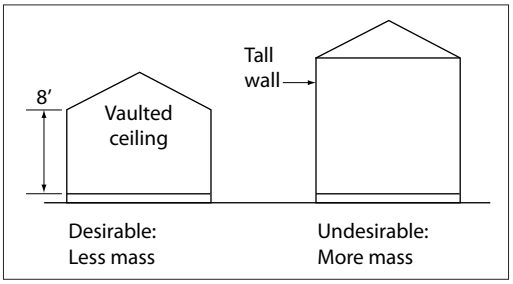
SECTION IV
House Design

Roof Design/Massing

- Follow background topography with roof slopes.
- Design new roof slopes consistent or compatible with the existing roof slopes.
- Avoid multiple roof angles, types, or slopes as they create a disjointed and chaotic appearance.

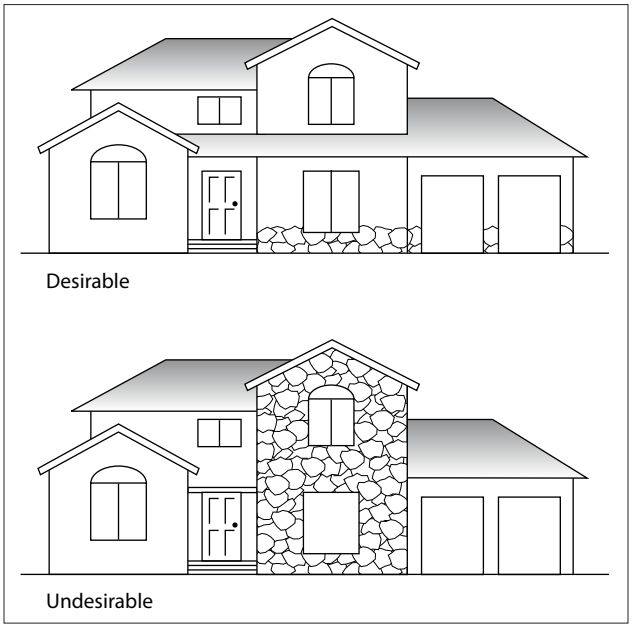


- Design vaulted ceiling rather than high exterior walls.



Materials and Finishes

- Incorporate materials and finishes on an addition or remodel consistent and continuous with the original house.
- Consider using lighter looking materials on second story and avoid using heavy looking materials.



- Incorporate quality materials/finishes, examples include natural materials such as adobe, slump block, brick, stone, stucco, wood, and clay tile roofs. With the proper design, attractive oxidized finished metals, such as copper, zinc, or weathering steel, may be used.

Historic Resources

- Maintain the historic integrity of the existing structure in the design of any additions or alterations to historic structures.
- Design additions to complement the historic character of the buildings.

SECTION V
Green Building and Universal Design

GREEN BUILDING

Green Building happens when development, including demolition, construction, and renovation, occurs in a manner that minimizes negative impacts on the community and the natural environment and creates a healthy environment for occupants. There are four fundamental objectives to Green Building: (1) conserve natural resources, (2) use energy wisely, (3) improve indoor air quality, and (4) plan for livable communities.

These Guidelines promote the use of green building measures into new residential construction and substantial remodels. Some sample strategies are provided below.

Design Goals

1. Maximize use of renewable energy resources for heating, cooling, and lighting.
2. Maximize conservation of energy and water.
3. Use building materials that reduce the consumption of nonrenewable resources and improve air quality.

Design Guidelines

The following guidelines are examples of green building techniques that relate to the home layout and siting. Refer to the City's Green Building information sheets and checklist for a more complete listing of Green Building home construction techniques.

- Orient the house on an east-west axis, if practical.
- Locate the most used living areas on the south side of the house.
- Locate the majority of the windows on the south elevation, limit windows on the west elevation and do not block morning/east sun exposure.
- Provide overhangs or awnings on south facing windows.
- Plant deciduous trees to shade west-facing glass in summer but allow for sun in winter.
- Locate windows and design floor plans to provide daylight in all living spaces,
- Install solar tubes, skylight, and fiber optics day lighting systems.
- Design and install water efficient landscaping and irrigation.

UNIVERSAL DESIGN

Universal design is a form of design that accommodates the needs of people of varying ages and abilities.

Design Goals

1. Incorporate universal design principles into a building at the design stage to make it more likely and possible for seniors and persons with disabilities to remain in the home and community in which they are accustomed.
2. Create designs that allow residents to "age in place."

Design Guidelines

- Minimize site grades and steps at the entry of a home and consider future ramp access adaptability, to the extent feasible.
- Incorporate universal design features at the building design stage to reduce cost; incorporation is often simply the selection of different hardware, for example lever or loop-type handles rather than round handles for doors and drawers; lever or loop-type handles require no gripping or twisting to operate.

- Other examples of universal design include, but are not limited to:
  - ◊ ½" or less threshold,
  - ◊ two peep holes in the front door at different levels,
  - ◊ low pile carpet,
  - ◊ 36" hallways and doors (hallways may be reduced to 32" if straight path to doorway is provided; doorways should be no less than 34"),
  - ◊ illuminated light switch toggles,
  - ◊ electrical receptacles 24" above the finished floor,
  - ◊ single lever faucets,
  - ◊ grab bars or backing for grab bars so they can be added at a later date,
  - ◊ roll-in showers,
  - ◊ roll out doors at the bottom of cabinets, and
  - ◊ garbage disposal at the front of cabinet and controls on the front of the oven.

SECTION VI
Appendices

Please note: These appendices include excerpts from the Larkspur Municipal Code (Appendix 1 and 2) and the Larkspur General Plan (Appendix 3). For a complete set of development regulations and General Plan goals, policies and action programs, please refer to the Municipal Code and General Plan on the City's web site at www.ci.larkspur.ca.us.

Appendix 1 - Projects Subject to Design Review and Exemptions

18.64.020 Projects Subject to Design Review and Exemptions

Except as noted below, any site or building development or modification requiring a discretionary land use permit or a building permit shall be subject to the requirements of this chapter. For purposes of this chapter, "story" shall not include basement or cellar areas that are fifty percent or more below grade on all sides.

A. Exemptions to this chapter include

1. New single-story single-family detached dwellings or single-story duplexes, which meet all of the following:

a. Do not increase the existing or previous floor area on the site by fifty percent or more; and

b. For which no discretionary land use permit is required.

2. Ground-level single-story additions to existing single-family detached dwellings and duplexes, which meet all of the following:

a. Do not extend more than fifteen feet above grade; and

b. Do not increase the existing or previous floor area on the site by fifty percent or more; and

c. For which no discretionary land use permit is required.

3. Accessory structures, which meet all of the following:

a. Do not extend more than fifteen feet above grade;

b. Have a gross floor area of four hundred square feet or less; and

c. For which no discretionary land use permit is required.

4. Roof-mounted solar panels that do not extend more than three feet above the roofline of the structure on which they are mounted.

5. Properties located within a specific plan area, planned unit or planned development district, or master residential plan for which design review approval or design guidelines have been previously approved by the Planning Commission or City Council that provide exemptions from this chapter shall be subject to the requirements of the design criteria and procedures, if any, established for those districts or areas.

6. Work which has been determined by the Planning Director to be minor or incidental within the intent and objectives of this chapter, except for minor or incidental changes to historic structures (i.e., buildings situated on property zoned H, Combining Heritage Preservation District, or listed on the National Register or Larkspur's Inventory of Historic Resources), which shall be reviewed by the Zoning Administrator in accordance with subsection (B) of this section.

7. Maintenance, repair or reconstruction of a structure pursuant to Chapter 18.68 LMC.

B. Projects That Require Design Approval by the Zoning Administrator

Projects that require design review approval by the Zoning Administrator include:

1. Ground-level single-story exterior remodels and additions to structures that increase the existing or previous floor area on the site by fifty percent or more and are not subject to Planning Commission approval pursuant to subsection (C) of this section.

2. Accessory structures that have a gross floor area greater than four hundred square feet, and for which no discretionary land use permit from the Planning Commission is required.

3. Detached garages or carports located within the required front yard in areas of steep terrain pursuant to LMC 18.20.070(A), 18.28.070(A), or 18.32.070(A) for which no discretionary land use permit from the Planning Commission is required.

4. Projects involving new construction or changes to an existing structure for which a discretionary land use permit from the Zoning Administrator is required pursuant to LMC 18.06.020.

5. Roof-mounted solar panels that extend more than three feet above the roofline of the structure on which they are mounted, and ground-mounted solar panels or equipment that do not meet the setback and/or screening requirements in LMC 18.16.225(B)(2).

6. Minor changes to the exterior of historic structures (i.e., buildings situated on property zoned H, Combining Heritage Preservation District, or listed on the National Register or Larkspur's Inventory of Historic Resources) such as, but not limited to, replacing windows, doors, molding, or siding, or changes in materials that do not significantly affect the historic or architectural character of the property based on the nature of the change, and, if necessary, a review by Larkspur's Historic Preservation Consultant.

C. Projects That Require Design Approval by the Planning Commission

Projects that require design review approval by the Planning Commission include:

1. New single-family detached dwellings or duplexes, or the reconstruction of existing structures, that do not meet the criteria for an exemption or Zoning Administrator review.

2. Additions to single-family detached dwellings or duplexes, including remodels or reconstruction that add floor area which do not meet the criteria for an exemption or Zoning Administrator review.

3. Any multifamily residence, structure or combination of residences.

4. Office, commercial and industrial buildings and structures.

5. Public or private assembly buildings and structures.

6. Sign programs (as provided in Chapter 18.60 LMC).

7. Major changes to the exterior of historic structures (i.e., buildings situated on property zoned H, Combining Heritage Preservation District, or listed on the National Register or Larkspur's Inventory of Historic Resources) that do not qualify as minor under subsection B of this section, including projects where only a building or demolition permit is required. Said changes shall include but are not limited to replacing windows, doors, molding, siding, changes in materials or any changes deemed by the Planning Director or Larkspur's Historic Preservation Consultant to significantly affect the historic or architectural character of the property.

8. Projects involving new construction or changes to an existing structure for which a discretionary land use permit from the Planning Commission is required pursuant to this title.

Appendix 2 - Design Review Findings

18.64.055 Findings for Approval of Applications

The Planning Commission or Zoning Administrator may grant approval or conditional approval of projects subject to the following affirmative findings:

A. Criteria. The proposed structure or alteration is substantially in conformance with LMC 18.64.050, Criteria for Approval of Applications.

B. Compatibility with Neighbors. The height, elevations, and placement on the site of the proposed structure or addition are compatible with the prevailing neighborhood character and scale and with the existing pattern of development in the neighborhood and/or commercial area. Further, the proposed structure or addition avoids significant and unreasonable loss or interference with privacy, light, solar access, and prominent scenic views (i.e., views of hillsides, Mt. Tamalpais, and San Francisco Bay from primary living areas).

C. Bulk. The orientation and scale of the proposed structure or addition in relation to the immediate neighborhood minimizes the perception of excessive bulk. The proposed structure or addition employs architectural features and details, which minimize, rather than accentuate, the prominence of the structure.

D. Overall Design. Architectural features of multiple structures, additions, or design elements combine together in an attractive and visually cohesive manner. Further, the overall composition of the proposed structure or addition is compatible with and complements the historic, architectural, and/or aesthetic character of the neighborhood or commercial area. These considerations include, but are not limited to, the structure's architectural style, size, design quality, use of building materials, and similar elements (e.g., relative to residential development, garage location, garage doors (number and size), window styles, front porches or entry stoops).

E. Other Plans and Regulations. The project is consistent with any applicable specific, area, or precise plans and conforms to the standards and regulations of all applicable provisions of the Larkspur Municipal Code.

F. Public Health, Safety and Welfare. The location, size, design, and characteristics of the proposed structure(s) are compatible with and will not be detrimental to the public health, safety and welfare of the persons residing in or working in the proposed structures or in developments adjacent to the proposed project. This includes the layout of the structures, parking, circulation, pathways, landscaping, and other amenities proposed for the site.

G. Green Building. The project design includes features that foster renewable energy and/or resource conservation, and the overall project (i.e., site design, building construction, energy efficiency, and waste reduction) meets or exceeds the applicable compliance threshold for green building as set forth by resolution of the City Council.

Appendix 3 - Description Of Larkspur's Neighborhoods

(Excerpt from Larkspur General Plan, 1990, Appendix B)