
Chapter 3. Urban Design, Neighborhood Preservation and Community Forest Management

BACKGROUND

Urban Form

Davis' urban form is generally characterized as that of a small-scale, university city situated within a larger agricultural area. The city is surrounded by agricultural lands, which are dissected by streams, flood control channels, and canals. The fields are most often open to expansive views across fields planted with low-growing grain and row crops.

The city can be divided into several distinct segments:

- The **Downtown** has a compact, grid street pattern. It is the center of commercial activity in Davis, and its design reflects its central role.
- Cohesive **residential neighborhoods** bounded by tree lined streets surround the Downtown. These neighborhoods are distinguished by the decade in which they were developed. The neighborhoods differ in their street pattern, lot sizes, conventional versus cluster arrangements, and linear greenways.
- The **UC Davis campus** is a dominant organizing element in the Davis area. With a few exceptions, however, the visual linkages between the campus and the city are generally weak, without defining structures or open spaces signifying major entrances, gateways and edges.

Major Views

Views from the agricultural fields are enclosed on the west by the Coast Range hills. Views to other directions are open to the horizon, although the Sierra Nevada Mountains, Sutter Buttes, and Mount Diablo can be seen on clear days. Davis is not highly visible from distant views due to an absence of natural or built vertical elements distinguished from the surrounding agricultural lands. The water towers on the campus and the Alumni Center are the distinguishing features in views north from Interstate 80.

Greenstreets

The City has a system of "Greenstreets", which consists of most of the existing and planned major arterial, minor arterial and collector streets in the City. Greenstreets are intended to provide convenient and attractive circulation routes for bicyclists and pedestrians, as well as cars. In July 1992, the City Council approved a General Plan policy interpretation which included guidelines for how Greenstreets should be designed in new developments.

GOALS, POLICIES AND ACTIONS

GOAL UD 1. Encourage community design throughout the City that helps to build community, encourage human interaction and support non-automobile transportation.

Policy UD 1.1 Promote urban/community design which is human-scaled, comfortable, safe and conducive to pedestrian use.

Standards

- a. New neighborhoods shall be designed so that daily shopping errands and trips to community facilities can generally be completed within easy walking and biking distances.
- b. New development shall incorporate a balanced circulation network that provides multi-route access for vehicles, bicycles and pedestrians to neighborhood centers, greenbelts, other parts of the neighborhood and adjacent districts and circulation routes.
- c. Garages on new single-family, duplex and split lot homes should be subordinate in visual importance to the house itself, especially the entry. Desirable and undesirable garage designs are shown in Figure 24.
- d. Where possible, commercial buildings should abut the street or other public accessway, with parking located behind.

Discouraged



Acceptable



Preferred



Preferred

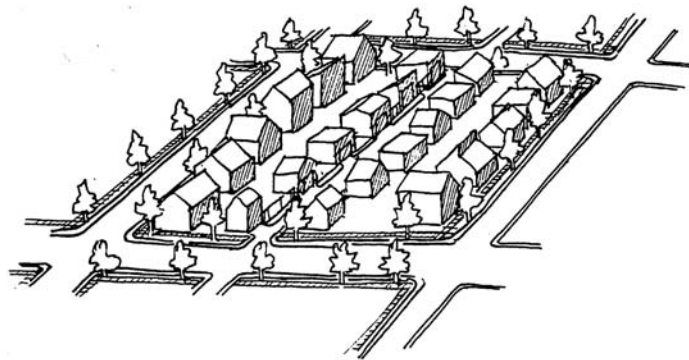


Figure 24: Garage Design Concepts

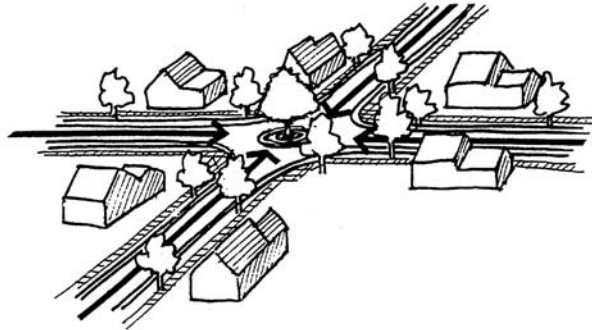
- e. Pedestrian walkways and/or building pass-throughs should be located to provide access from sidewalks into individual projects separate from major vehicular driveways and circulation.
- f. New cul-de-sacs shall have bicycle/pedestrian passages through them that connect to other streets, greenbelts or publicly accessible corridors.
- g. Designs that are urban in character are encouraged around the core area and at neighborhood activity nodes. Such designs include, but are not limited to, buildings that extend to the front and side property lines, buildings which provide a feeling of permanence and durability, and buildings with outdoor cafes and plazas. Desired character for the Core is illustrated in Figure 25.
- h. Pedestrian-oriented design is encouraged in the allocation of space, building size and placement, site enhancement, open space design, connection to pedestrian/bikeways and site amenities.
- i. New development should include pedestrian-attracting public spaces that provide informal areas for people of all ages to interact with one another and with nature.
- j. New buildings should be integrated with open space to enhance living and working areas.
- k. In commercial and light industrial areas, buildings and their entries should be designed to minimize distance to public transit.
- l. Commercial and light industrial areas should have access connections at regular intervals along the perimeter of the project area to adjacent bike and pedestrian pathways and easily-accessible, landscaped pedestrian and bicycle access between various areas.
- m. Walled and gated neighborhoods are discouraged.
- n. Create opportunities for interesting visual focal points and vistas throughout creative street layouts, as illustrated in Figure 26.



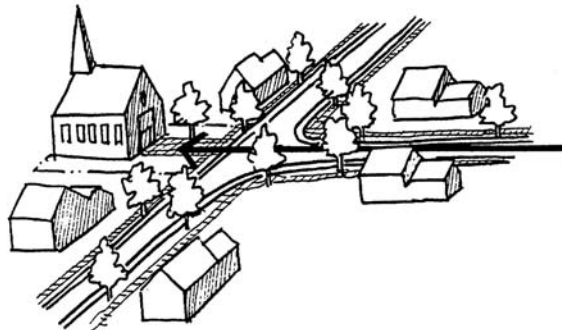
Note: This figure is intended to illustrate the desired general scale and character of the core area, and examples of streetscape elements. This figure is not intended to illustrate specific examples of desired architecture.

Figure 25: Core Area Character

Focal Point



Visual Terminus



Window On A Park

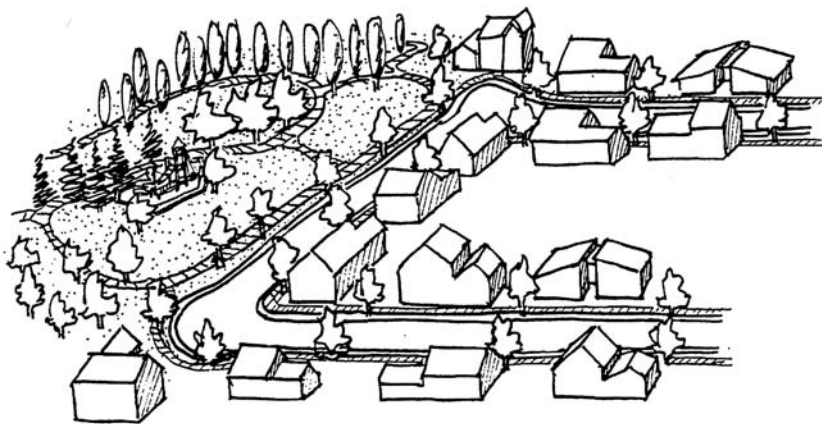


Figure 26: Creative Street Design Concepts

Actions

- o. Develop flexible street design standards that provide adequate bicycle and pedestrian safety, emergency vehicle access, and strong aesthetic qualities in rights-of-way that are as narrow as possible.
- p. Install accent planting at neighborhood entry points.
- q. Install tree-shaded benches throughout Davis.
- r. Utilize on-street parking to provide a physical and visual barrier between autos and pedestrians, where appropriate.

GOAL UD 2. Maintain an aesthetically pleasing environment and manage a sustainable community forest to optimize environmental, aesthetic, social and economic benefits.

Policy UD 2.1 Preserve and protect scenic resources and elements in and around Davis, including natural habitat and scenery and resources reflective of place and history.

Actions

- a. Undertake a program to inventory and describe Davis' existing scenic resources and elements reflective of place and history.
- b. Develop, adopt and implement policies and actions to protect and preserve identified scenic resources and elements reflective of place and history.

Also see the goals, policies and actions related to historic buildings and districts in Chapter 16, Historic and Archaeological Resources.

Policy UD 2.2 Maintain and increase the amount of greenery, especially street trees, in Davis, both for aesthetic reasons and to provide shade, cooling, habitat, air quality benefits, and visual continuity.

Standards

- a. New local streets in residential areas, collector streets and arterial streets should have landscaped strips with trees between sidewalks and streets.
- b. Arterial and collection streets in new developments should have planted medians, but with widths sized to accommodate tree and shrub plantings. Medians on collector streets should be limited to locations where the median contributes to a specific purpose or solves a specific problem, such as enhancing a neighborhood entry, calming traffic, or providing a needed pedestrian refuge at intersections. Removal of street trees to accommodate an increase in vehicular traffic shall occur only as a last resort, after review by appropriate boards and commissions.
- c. Streets that are planted in the future are expected to have wide canopies, sufficient to eventually provide, at maturity, at least 50 percent shade coverage of the pavement area of local streets and 30 percent shade coverage of the pavement area of collector and arterial streets.
- d. New developments should include Greenstreets, where appropriate.
- e. Existing arterial and collector streets should be converted to Greenstreets where appropriate and existing local streets should be evaluated for adequate tree canopies..
- f. Removal of street trees to accommodate increased vehicular traffic shall occur only as a last resort.

Actions

- g. Maintain existing street trees and implement a program of replacement street tree planting using large canopy deciduous trees where appropriate.
 - h. In redevelopment or new development areas, plant trees and other vegetation to the greatest extent possible, with a minimum of pavement.
 - i. Develop a street tree master plan that specifies the species of trees to be planted on each roadway segment in Davis and provides a strategy for funding, maintenance and replacement.
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- j. Evaluate existing street trees for adequate canopies, and consider streets found to be lacking sufficient canopy for street tree improvement programs.
- k. Complete, implement, evaluate and revise the City-wide tree planting, preservation and protection ordinance.
- l. Establish a tree gift program which encourages the use of potted trees or plants to be donated to the City for planting (i.e. Christmas trees).
- m. Continue to work with community groups such as Tree Davis to organize tree planting and maintenance activities.
- n. Implement a program to replace trees in a timely fashion on streets with significant existing trees that could be expected to die soon.
- o. Develop a Community Forest Management Plan for the City of Davis.

Policy UD 2.3 Require an architectural "fit" with Davis' existing scale for new development projects.

Standards

- a. There should be a scale transition between intensified land uses and adjoining lower intensity land uses.
- b. Taller buildings should be stepped back at upper levels in areas with a relatively smaller-scale character.
- c. Buildings should be varied in size, density and design.

Policy UD 2.4 Create affordable and multi-family residential areas that include innovative designs and on-site open space amenities that are linked with public bicycle/pedestrian ways, neighborhood centers and transit stops.

Standards

- a. Multi-family buildings should provide easy pedestrian access to the nearest transit stop and/or neighborhood center.
- b. Multi-family development design should be compatible with adjoining single family areas.

- c. High density housing should be organized around usable common space.
- d. Multi-family housing complexes should be designed, constructed and managed in projects of no more than 150 units, not including any density bonus.

Policy UD 2.5 Ensure attractive and functional signs.

Actions

- a. Update and maintain design guidelines for regulation of signs.
- b. Update and maintain sign regulations as part of the City's zoning ordinance.
- c. Work with Yolo County and the California Department of Transportation to minimize the number and size of off-site advertising along the freeways in the Planning Area.

Policy UD 2.6 Require high-quality design standards for manufacturing, assembly, research and development, warehousing, and distribution type land uses.

Standards

- a. Stored materials, goods, parts or equipment should be screened from adjacent public streets or highways.
- b. Loading facilities should be designed as an integral part of the building(s) which they serve and should be located in an inconspicuous manner.
- c. Extension of loading facilities, including incidental parking and maneuvering areas, into required minimum setback areas is prohibited.
- d. Roof mounted equipment should be screened from view of any ground level area accessible to the general public.
- e. Trash enclosures, noise generating equipment, and other nuisances shall be adequately screened or located away from any adjacent residential use.

GOAL UD 3. Use good design as a means to promote human safety.

Policy UD 3.1 Use good design to promote safety for residents, employees, and visitors to the City.

Standards

- a. Parks, shopping centers, schools and other institutional uses should be located on prominent, central sites where they will "belong" to the neighborhood they serve with strong pedestrian connections to these central sites.

Policy UD 3.2 Provide exterior lighting that enhances safety and night use in public spaces, but minimizes impacts on surrounding land uses.

Standards

- a. Outdoor lighting should not unreasonably interfere with the use and enjoyment of dark-sky activities and near-by residences.

Actions

- b. Establish a hierarchy for lighting fixture intensity, height and character based on its intended purpose.
- c. Consider a retrofit program for light fixtures which are not appropriately shielded, including city lighting.

GOAL UD 4. Create an urban design framework that would strengthen the physical form of the city.

Policy UD 4.1 Develop an urban design framework plan to consolidate and clarify the relevant design concepts in this chapter and other chapters to promote a positive and memorable image for the city and to reinforce the functional systems of the city such as land use, circulation, and open space.

Actions

- a. Develop an urban design framework plan which includes the elements of districts, edges, paths, entries, centers, nodes and focal points. The framework plan would be implemented through the design of public and private projects.

- b. Consider the framework plan in the development of design guidelines and in the review of individual public and private projects.

GOAL UD 5. Create and enforce clear and reasonable design guidelines that operationalize the relevant goals, policies and actions of this general plan.

Policy UD 5.1 Develop and implement new design guidelines which are reviewed periodically.

Actions

- a. Replace the City's "Architectural and Landscape Architectural Standards," approved in 1976, with updated design review guidelines that implement the relevant goals, policies and actions of this general plan. Consider some form of citizen oversight in the update of the design review guidelines.
- b. Use community image surveys to provide a basis for the updated design guidelines.
- c. Ensure that new design guidelines are realistic and can be implemented by the public and private sector(s), and are compatible with nearby residential areas.
- d. Vest primary responsibility for design review with City staff, and include appropriate public notice appeal procedures.
- e. Develop site design standards for new single-family residential development that create variability of lot sizes, FARs, setbacks, building heights, floor plans, and architectural styles/treatments within each new development area. The Planning and Building Department shall take the lead in developing these standards with input from various community groups and local professionals.

GOAL UD 6. Strengthen the city's neighborhoods to retain desirable characteristics while allowing for change and evolution, promoting public and private investments, and encouraging citizen involvement in neighborhood planning.

Policy UD 6.1 Recognize the existence of individual neighborhoods with general boundaries and facilitate the development of neighborhood strategies in partnership with residents and property owners. The strategies should recognize the unique characteristics of the individual neighborhood and the potential for change, within the

context of a well-planned city. The strategies should be directed toward solving unique neighborhood problems and implementing neighborhood priorities and enhancing livability.

Actions

- a. Develop a “community partnership” program to provide information and facilitate the involvement of neighborhood residents and property owners in neighborhood planning and problem solving.
- b. Identify and explore funding possibilities for physical improvements which would address neighborhood problems and priorities and improve livability.
- c. Revise city codes to remove regulatory barriers to neighborhood improvements and livability, particularly in older neighborhoods. Such revisions could be related to development standards and home occupation standards in the zoning ordinance
- d. Study revisions to the current building plan check, inspection and permit process to reduce barriers to infill projects and to residential and commercial remodels of existing buildings.

