

## Chapter I

### Introduction & User Guide

#### A. City Image

The City of San Juan Capistrano is a picturesque community which has been deeply influenced by its Native American heritage, agrarian past and Spanish Mission history.

San Juan Capistrano's natural setting, among the hillsides of Capistrano Valley, and its built environment evokes a strong identifiable "sense of place". Large amounts of open space, high quality architectural design, its historic character, and "small-town" rural atmosphere distinguish it from surrounding communities. The City's distinctive physical character reinforces its unique identity and presents design opportunities and challenges.

Enhancing the visual and functional quality of existing and future development in San Juan Capistrano, and protecting its physical features is a stated General Plan goal.

Minimizing weaknesses of existing development that negatively affect the character of the community and avoiding similar conditions in the future is necessary in order to improve the City's built environment.



## **B. Community Design Goals & Policies**

The Community Design Element of the General Plan addresses the conservation and enhancement of the visual quality of San Juan Capistrano and identifies the following major community design goals which relate to the City's image and identity:

### ***Community Design Goal 1: Encourage and preserve a sense of place***

**Policy 1.1:** Preserve significant amounts of land and important natural features for open space.

**Policy 1.2:** Encourage high quality and human scale design in development to maintain the character of the City.

**Policy 1.3:** Encourage the participation by all members of the community in activities which promote the City and create local pride.

### ***Community Design Goal 2: Preserve the historic character of the community.***

**Policy 2.1:** Encourage development which complements the City's traditional, historic character through site design, architecture, and landscaping.

### ***Community Design Goal 3: Preserve and enhance natural features.***

**Policy 3.1:** Limit development of important natural characteristics such as ridgelines, unique hillside features and creeks.

**Policy 3.2:** Encourage the recreational use of natural features, such as hillsides and creeks.

**Policy 3.3:** Preserve and enhance scenic transportation corridors, including Interstate 5 and the railroad.

**Policy 3.4:** Conserve important viewsheds.



### **C. Urban Design Guidelines Objectives**

The Design Guidelines promote high quality development that will:

- Implement goals and policies of the General Plan.
- Enhance the City's unique identity and character.
- Stimulate investment and strengthen the economic vitality of the City.
- Protect or enhance property values.
- Maintain a high-quality of life without unduly restricting private enterprise, initiative, or innovation in design.

Implementation of the Design Guidelines will enhance the City's image and strengthen the public and private realm. The guidelines promote design freedom and creativity by encouraging positive existing design patterns and characteristics and by promoting design solutions that reflect a sense of timelessness, elegance and quality.

### **D. Applicability**

New construction, additions and exterior alterations to multiple-family, commercial, industrial, and public and institutional buildings as well as residential subdivisions and modifications to approved landscaping or parking lot design will be subject to compliance with the Design Guidelines.

The Design Guidelines will be utilized during the project review process to promote the highest level of design quality, and creativity. Where Title 9 of the Land Use Code establishes development regulations and/or site-specific development standards guide development of a particular property, these Design Guidelines will serve as a supplement.



### **E. Interpretation**

The Design Guidelines are more “descriptive” than “prescriptive” and may be interpreted with some flexibility. The Guidelines are discretionary and alternative solutions may be considered if they meet or exceed the intent of the guidelines.

### **F. Exemptions**

The following projects, when in compliance with all other City ordinances, are exempt from the Design Guidelines provisions:

- Site and building maintenance work which preserve the appearance or function of structures, landscaping or parking grounds.
- Temporary uses and structures, pursuant to City of San Juan Capistrano Land Use Code.
- Development proposals in the building permit process, which have received entitlement approvals prior to the adoption of the Design Guidelines.

### **G. Organization**

The Design Guidelines manual is comprised of 8 chapters, which cover residential, commercial and industrial uses. Separate chapters are dedicated to Downtown Commercial, Special Consideration Commercial and Sign guidelines.

### **H. Design Review Process**

As part of the design process, developers should seek input from City staff, community groups, affected property owners, tenants, merchants, and business owners prior to making a significant investment.

The Design Guidelines should be the basis for the project design and review process. Project proponents shall explore creative, site-specific design solutions and shall avoid use of franchise or boilerplate prototypes.



## **I. General Design Principles**

The following list establishes general project design principles, based on frequently encountered design issues. The design principles list shall be used as a reference during the design process and shall serve as the framework for project evaluation between project applicants, city staff and policy makers.

Project proponents will be required to address these principles by appropriate design solutions, and to describe in a narrative format how a development proposal complies with them.

### **Design Issue/ Principle 1: Human Scale**

Buildings and public spaces should have strong pedestrian orientation and human scale. The physical environment should be comfortable, friendly, accessible and approachable. Parking areas should be designed to minimize the impact of automobiles on pedestrian circulation and to be less visually intrusive. Opportunities to convey a sense of human scale should be maximized through provision of outdoor amenities such as street furniture and careful attention to detail.

### **Design Issue/ Principle 2: Eclectic Building Styles**

San Juan Capistrano embraces a diversity of building styles. Building styles in San Juan Capistrano include but are not limited to Mediterranean, Spanish Colonial, Monterey, Mission Revival, Rural Agrarian, Modern, Western and Early California. Regardless of style, buildings must relate to surrounding development patterns in scale, orientation, height and bulk. “New” and “old” styles can co-exist if building context is properly considered.

### **Design Issue/ Principle 3: Authenticity**

Buildings should convey a sense of timelessness, elegance and quality regardless of style or genre. Buildings should look durable and permanent not temporary or makeshift. The particular style chosen should be well-executed and consistently carried out from overall building form to fine detail.

### **Design Issue/ Principle 4: Dialog with Surroundings**

Buildings should be oriented, designed and sited to interact with their surroundings. Siting and design of buildings should take account of the overall physical setting in order to help frame and accent building form.

Buildings should convey a distinct relationship to their larger more distant context while simultaneously relating to their immediate surroundings in scale, mass and bulk.

### **Design Issue/ Principle 5: Heritage and Tradition**

San Juan Capistrano’s history and tradition should be reflected in the design of specific project elements where appropriate such as building details, landscaping, site fixtures, etc. Each new project should recognize “what came before” and establish a connection - not necessarily a literal one - with the past.

### **Design Issue/Principle 6: Richness of Details and Materials**

Building materials, surfaces, finishes, lighting and landscaping should be high quality. They should be designed and executed with a high degree of craftsmanship. Design features should be subtle, not ostentatious. High quality design standards should apply to all private as well as public projects including elements of street design, landscaping, street lighting, etc.

### **Design Issue/ Principle 7: Relationship to natural Settings**

Buildings should be sited and oriented to maximize views to and from surrounding landforms, topographical features, view corridors, vistas, community landmarks and cultural features.

### **Design Issue/ Principle 8: Linkages and Connections**

Site planning should maximize linkages and connections to surrounding public uses, activities and pedestrian networks. Consideration should be given to creation of a hierarchy of pedestrian networks. Consideration should be given to creation of a hierarchy of pedestrian pathways and public spaces.

### **Design Issue/ Principle 9: Incremental Growth**

The community of San Juan Capistrano favors slower, “organic” growth and development patterns over “large sum” big scale projects. Larger projects, especially those on the few remaining parcels of land in the City, should be master-planned and built-out in a way that conveys a sense of project growth over time. Ideally, each separate phase or stage of projects should be designed to “stand on its own” so projects look complete and finished even if additional growth will occur sometime in the future.

## **J. Design Guidelines Implementation**

The Design Guidelines will be utilized by staff, applicants and decision makers as part of the development design review process. In order to provide expedited project processing and ensure implementation of the guidelines, the design review process includes the following optional and mandatory steps:

- **Pre-application conference meeting (optional)**  
A meeting between City staff, the applicant and his/her representatives is recommended prior to submitting a development request involving design review. This meeting will provide the forum for an initial presentation of the project concept to staff and an opportunity for the applicant to receive preliminary design feed-back and general information about the design review process, including applicability of design guidelines by City staff. Staff will ensure that a copy of the design principles and guidelines is provided for reference purposes to the applicant.
  
- **Application submittal meeting (mandatory)**  
The project planner will meet with the applicant to review the application submittal package for completeness. In conjunction with the submittal package the applicant will provide a narrative to address project compliance with the Design Principles. In addition, the applicant will be required to submit a “Design Guidelines Checklist” which will address applicability and implementation of design guidelines with respect to the project.
  
- **Project review meeting (mandatory)**  
Approximately 3-4 weeks after the project filing date a project review meeting will be scheduled with the applicant to discuss staff comments. If deemed necessary or desirable, the project planner will arrange for representatives from other City departments to attend the meeting to address their comments in detail. Following the meeting, final plans will be prepared by the applicant for action by the decision making body.



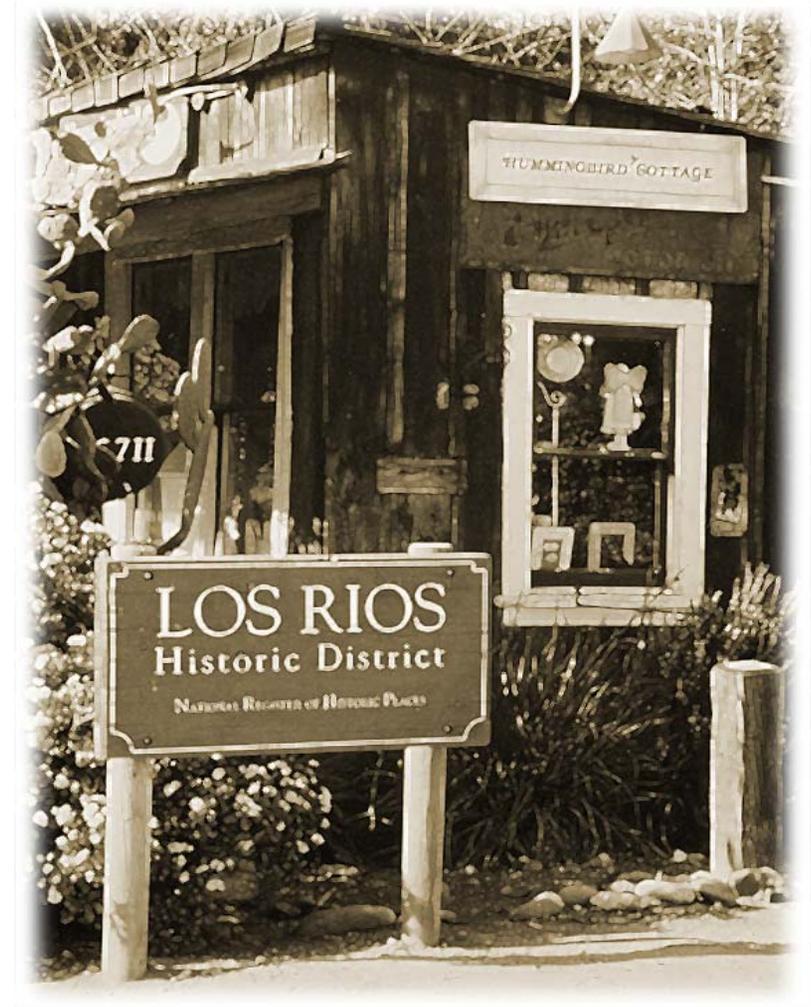
- Design Review Committee (DRC) work session (optional)  
A preliminary presentation or work session with DRC may be scheduled if the applicant desires input prior to DRC action.
- Formal project presentation and action  
Staff will review final submittal plans and prepare a report and recommendation(s) for consideration by the decision-making authority. The Planning Director, DRC, Planning Commission or City Council will evaluate the project in terms of compliance with the Design Principles and applicable design guidelines.
- Conceptual Master Plan review  
When a particular project is part of a larger phased development, submittal and review of the master development concept shall be required and shall be completed in conjunction with the first project's application request. Subsequent review and approval of master plan components for which detailed information is not available at the time of initial review/processing of the master plan shall be required and shall be completed prior to issuance of building permits or as otherwise conditioned at the time of the master plan's approval.



### **K. Project review submittal requirements**

Applicants shall submit information deemed necessary to complete design and environmental review of the project. The Planning Director shall prescribe the type and form of information required and shall ensure that is of sufficient detail to allow adequate analysis of the application. A list and description of typical project submittal requirements follows.

- Architectural Control application form.
- Application processing fee deposit, per adopted City Council Resolution and check payable to Orange County Fire Authority (OCFA) for OCFA review.
- A title report for the property, completed by a licensed title company and prepared within 30 days of application submittal.
- A tree survey of existing trees (over 6-inches in diameter measured 36-inches above grade) indicating type, location, condition, diameter, height, and proposed disposition.
- Color and Materials Board (8.5-inches by 11-inches) indicating finish materials and paint/stain colors of all building elements, including roofing.
- Other technical studies (to be prepared under contract by the City with the cost to be borne by the applicant) as required by the Environmental Administrator for determining environmental compliance.
- Fifteen copies of preliminary project plans, folded to 9-inches by 12-inches and one set of photographic reductions (8.5-inches by 11-inches).



Submitted project plan shall include the following:

- Complete building elevations (north, south, east and west) drawn to scale, including adjacent buildings, dimensions for height of wall plane (finished grade to eave line), maximum height of roof, building materials/colors keyed to color board (full color elevations due prior to Planning Commission review).
- Existing and proposed topography, limits of grading, cut/fill quantities (cubic yards), cross-sections, finished slope grades, and retaining wall elevations with full dimensions.
- Roof plan depicting ridges, valleys, drainage direction, mechanical well (including sections indicating how HVAC equipment will be screened from public view).
- Preliminary landscape plan(s) showing type, number, location, container size of plant species, and existing specimen trees/plants to be preserved or relocated.
- Lighting plan, indicating photometric analysis and catalog picture of proposed exterior lighting fixtures. Photometric analysis to include both point and isoline analysis of measured footcandles (fc) and photometric summary depicting minimum, maximum, and average fc, minimum/maximum ratio, and average minimum ratio.
- Construction details showing wall, door and window sections; preliminary window and door schedule; retaining wall sections and elevations; trash enclosure design; project identification sign(s); and fencing.
- For non-residential projects, a sign program indicating the size, location, materials, colors, and illumination of all project signage.

