



FOSTER CITY Single Family Objective Design Standards

PC Study Session #3

6/5/2025





City of FOSTER CITY

2023 - 2031 Housing Element Update

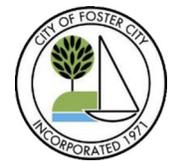


Prepared for:
City of Foster City
Adopted May 22, 2023
Revisions Adopted March 20, 2024

URBAN
PLANNING
PARTNERS
INC.

HOUSING ELEMENT UPDATE 2023-2031

- On March 20, 2024, the City Council approved the adoption of a General Plan Amendment consisting of revisions to the 2023-31 Housing Element.
- H-B-4-a Update Architectural and Solar Guidelines for Single Family Homes - December 2025.
- The Housing Element is an 8-year plan and every year the city must report on the status and progress in implementing the Housing Element by submitting the Annual Progress Report (APR) to HCD and LCI.



URBAN
PLANNING
PARTNERS
INC.

CURRENT DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS FOR SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES

- Complex and lengthy review process
- Discretionary planning review can be unpredictable and require significant resources
- May lead to increase in project costs



Architectural and Solar Guidelines



For Use in R-1 (Single-Family Residential) Districts

CITY OF FOSTER CITY
Community Development Department
610 Foster City Boulevard
Foster City, CA 94404

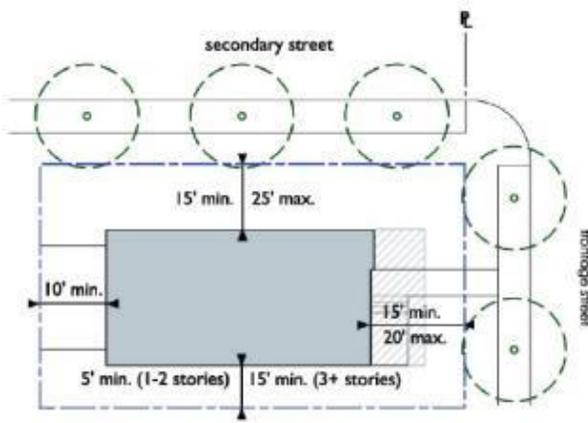
Adopted December 1989
Revised April 1992
Revised October 1997
Reformatted January 2001

CURRENT DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS FOR SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES

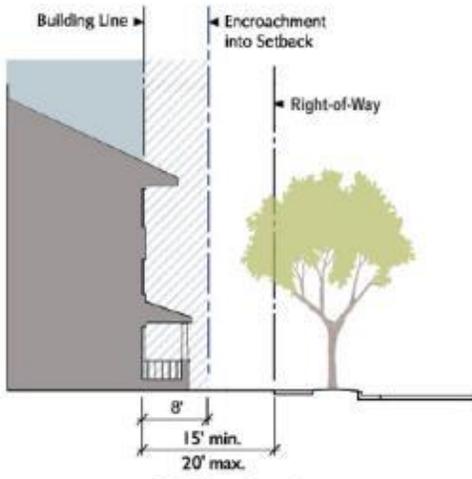
- Foster City Municipal Code, Title 17 Zoning (**11 chapters**)
- Architectural and Solar Guidelines
- Citywide Policies (**approx. 14 policies**)
- Homeowners' Association (HOA) Prototypes (**39 prototypes**)



URBAN
PLANNING
PARTNERS
INC.



Plan View



Building Section

Example graphics illustrating setbacks and allowable encroachments.

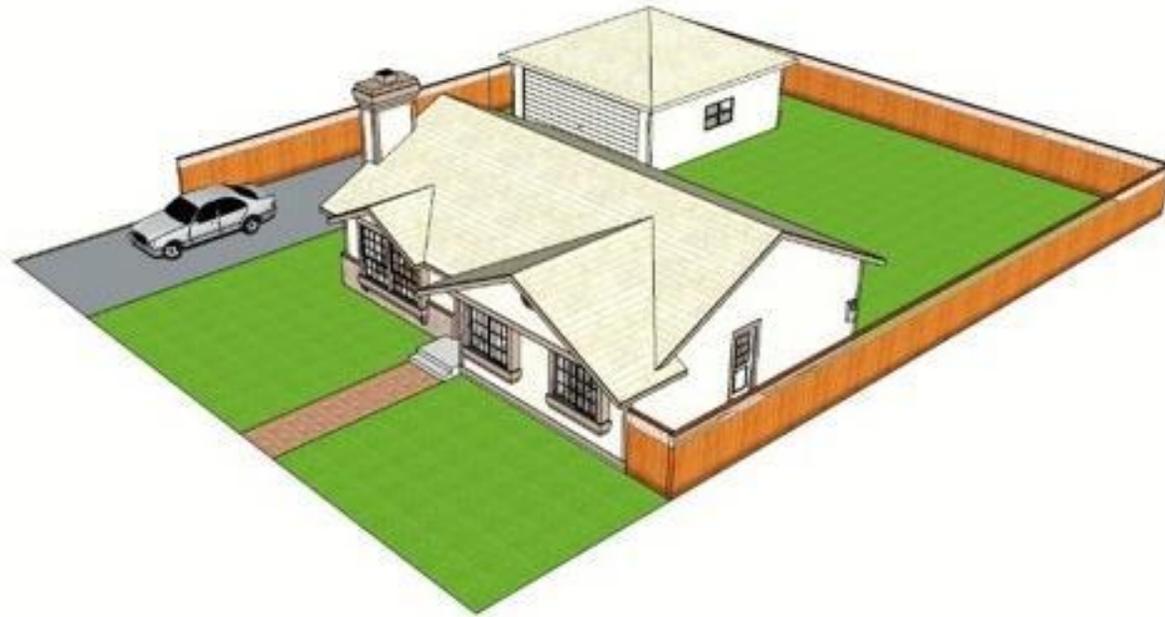
WHY ADOPT OBJECTIVE DESIGN STANDARDS FOR SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES?

- Objective standards offer residents, property owners, and developers clear development and design standards for design, articulation, and massing expected within Foster City neighborhoods.
- The standards will convey expectations to homeowners/applicants. This approach removes obstacles to residential permitting by shortening application timelines and clearly outlining requirements from the outset of the design phase.



Components of Single-Family Home Design

- **Site Design**
 - Entry Location and street Connectivity (Orientation)
 - Curb cuts and driveways
- **Building Design**
 - Building Massing (Solar Impacts)
 - Articulation (to create visual interest)
 - Materials and Colors
 - Roof Forms
 - Garages
 - Principal entry
 - Balconies
 - Windows and Doors
 - Gutters, downspouts, and flashings
 - Interior layout (not part of objective standards)
- **Accessory Structures**
 - Location and setbacks
 - Coverage
 - Height
 - Materials
- **Misc**
 - Placement of Mechanical Equipment (e.g., air conditioning units)
 - Yards
 - Landscaping and Lighting
 - Fences



Study Session Topics

- April 17, 2025
 - Site Design
 - Building Design
 - Accessory Structures
- June 5, 2025
 - Yards
 - Fences
 - Windscreens
 - Landscaping and Lighting
 - Eichler Design
- September 4, 2025 (Tentative)
 - Waterfront Properties
 - Architectural Review Process
 - Amendments to Municipal Code



Yards: Front, Rear, and Side – Rectangular and Wedge Lots

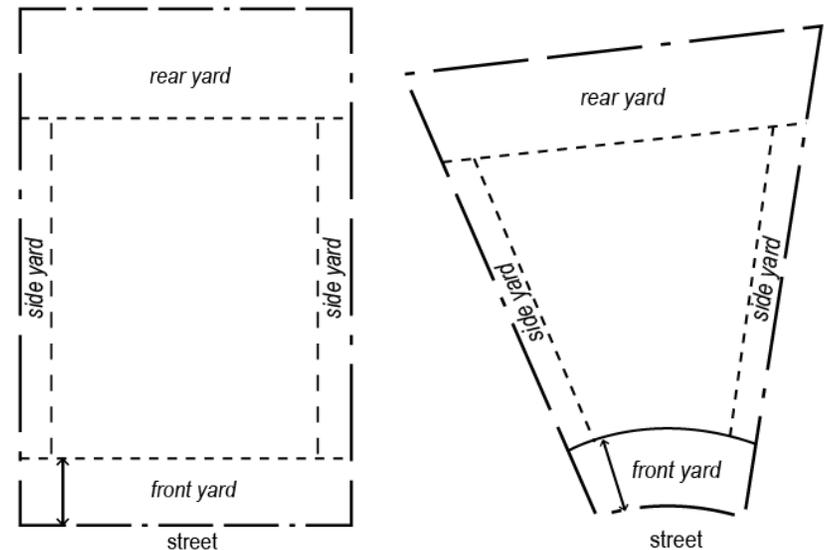
Proposed Standards:

Yard, Front. “Front yard” means a yard extending across the **front full width** of the lot between the side lines and measured from the front property line of the lot to the **main** wall of the **main** building **closest to the street or main wall of any covered porch; provided that if any building line or official plan line has been established for the street upon which the lot faces, then such measurement shall be taken from such building line or official plan line to the main building.** The front yard shall include all the yard area between the **main** building and the front property line of the lot.

Yard, Rear. “Rear yard” means a yard extending across the full width of the lot **farthest from the street** and measured between the rear line of the lot and the nearest line of the **main** wall of the main building.

Yard, Side. “Side yard” means a yard between the side line of the lot and the nearest line of the **main** wall of the **main** building and extending from the front yard of the lot to the rear yard.

Should the definition of "rear yard" include that it is the farthest from the street?



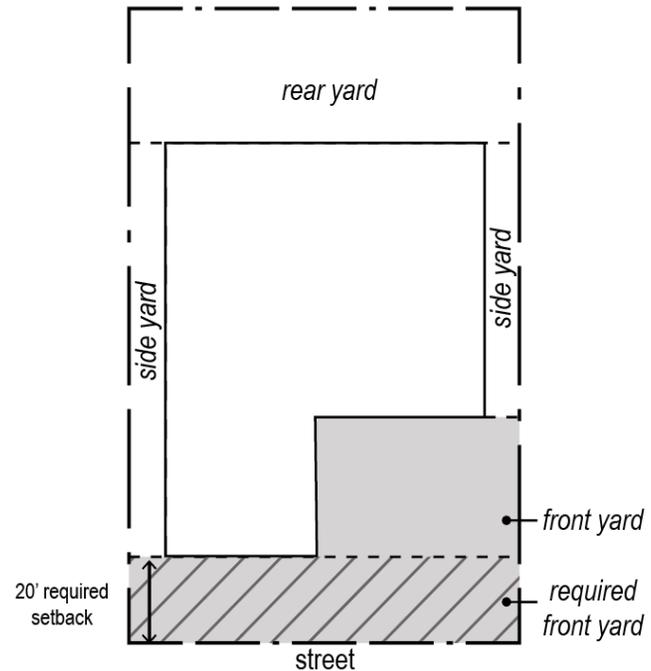
Yards: Required Yard vs Yard

Proposed Standards:

Yard, Required. "Required yard" means the portion of the yard that is required to be unobstructed from the ground upwards to meet the required setback.

Comment: This allows a distinction between what is allowed/prohibited in the entire yard, such as mechanical equipment prohibited in the front yard, vs only things allowed/prohibited in the required yard, such as projections into a required yard.

Should the definition of "required yard" be added to clarify the yard required by setbacks vs the yard area between the house and the property line?



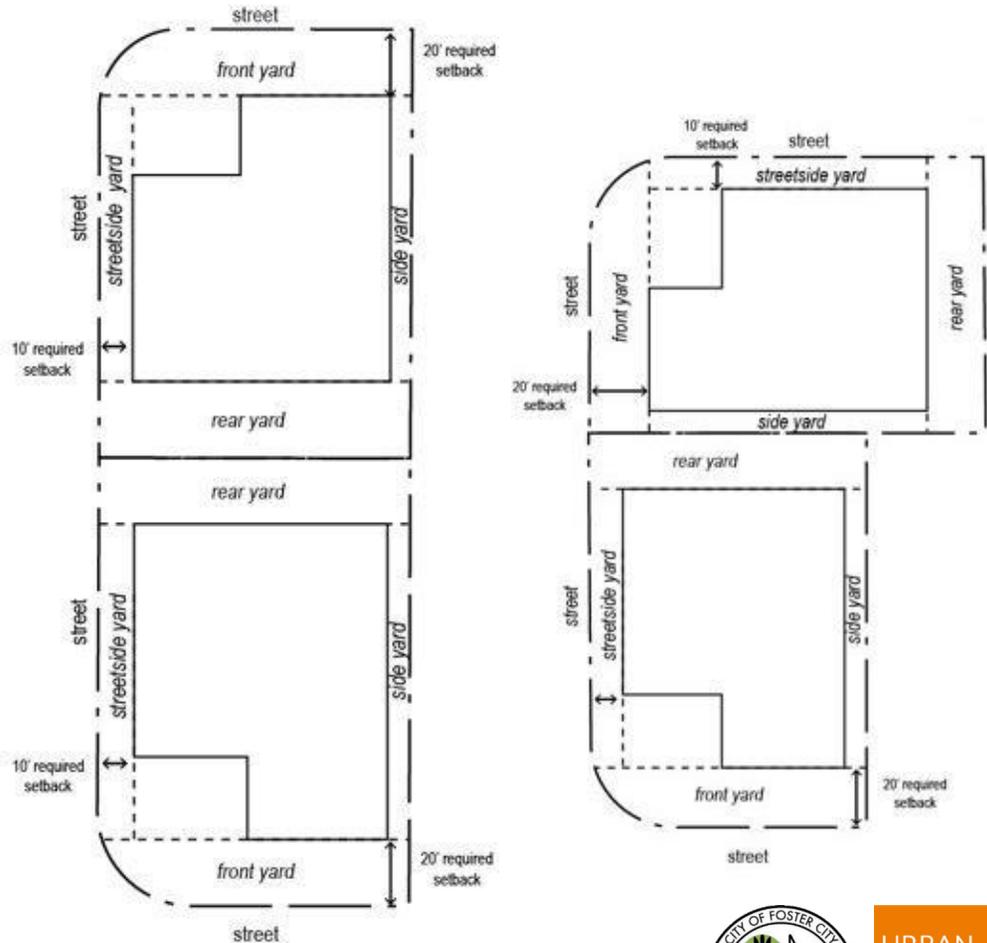
Yards: Corner Lots

Proposed Standards:

Side yards on corner lots. **In any district on** On any corner lot, the side yard on the street side of such corner lot shall **not** be ten (10) feet **less than fifty percent of the minimum front yard required on the contiguous lot to the rear.**

Comment: New language is simpler with the same result. Will move this setback requirement out of 17.54 Yards to 17.12 R-1, and 17.14 R-2.

Should the street side yard for corner lots be changed to 10 feet regardless of the orientation of the lot behind?



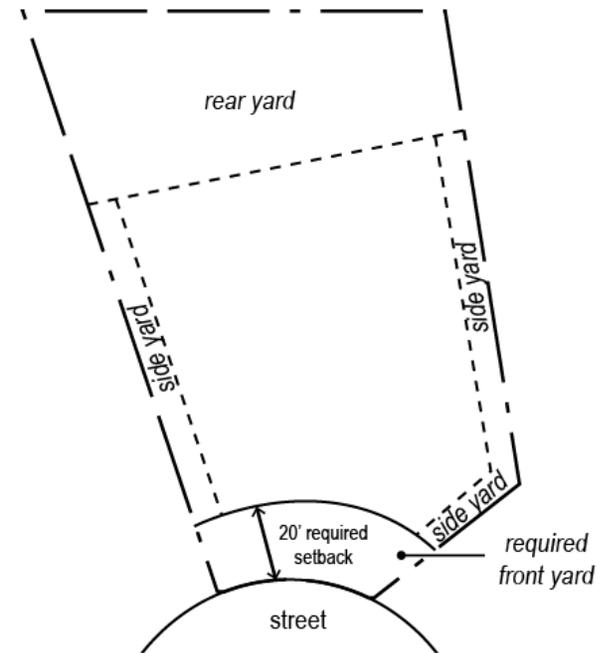
Yards: Lots with > 4 Sides

Proposed Standards:

For lots with more than four (4) sides, the front and rear yards shall be as defined by Chapter 17.04 and yards that are not the front yard and not the rear yard shall be considered side yards unless shown to be otherwise on the original building permit plans.

Comment: This approach is consistent with most or all original site plans on file.

On lots with more than 4 sides, should all the yards that are not front or rear yards be considered side yards?



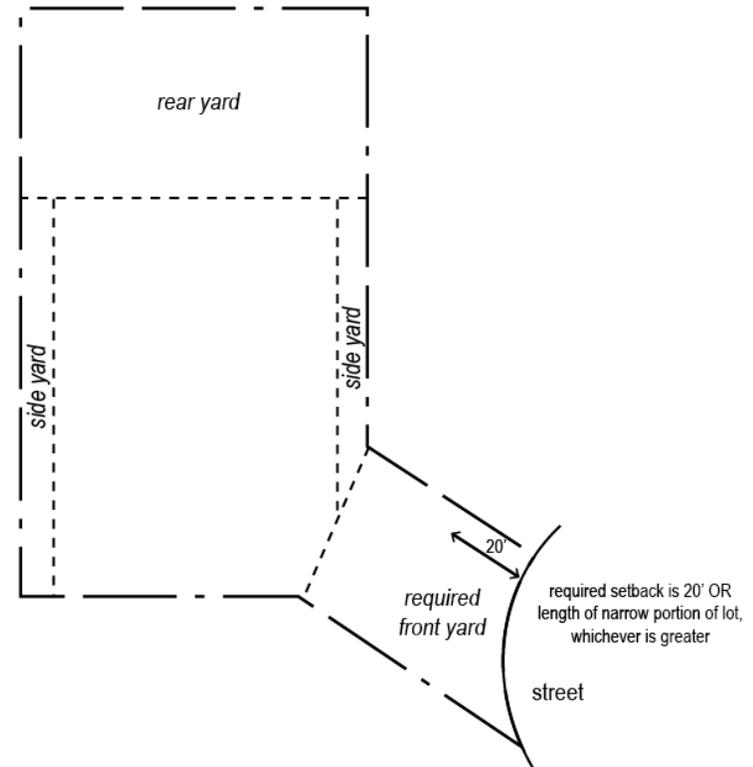
Yards: Flag Lot

Proposed Standards:

"Flag lot" is a lot with less than the required minimum width for the district measured along the frontage on a public or private street, has access to a public or private street by a strip of land at least 20 feet in length, and the largest portion of the lot is situated behind adjoining lots which front on a public or private street.

On a flag lot the front and rear yards shall be as defined in Chapter 17.04, with the front yard being the portion closest to the street. The front yard setback shall be twenty (20) feet or the length of the narrow portion of the lot, whichever is greater. All yards other than the front and rear yards shall be considered side yards unless shown to be otherwise on the original building permit plans.

Should the front yard on flag lots be the access strip to the larger portion of the lot or twenty (20) feet, whichever is greater?



Yards: Projections into Yards

Proposed Standards:

17.54.010 Projections into yards—Architectural features. Architectural features on the main building, such as bay windows, cornices, eaves and canopies, ~~may extend into the required yard subject to the following~~ ~~May not extend closer than three feet to any side lot line.~~ ~~Eaves and canopies:~~

- a. Architectural features such as bay windows, fireplace chimneys, cornices, eaves, trellis, open or covered porches, may extend a maximum of two feet into ~~the any~~ required side yard and five (5) feet into any required front or rear yard;
- b. ~~An attached trellis may extend a maximum of four feet from the main building, may extend a maximum of four feet into the required front yard setback but must be set back a minimum of ten feet from the front property line, shall be in proportion to the width and height of the wall to which it is attached, and shall be constructed of wood.~~
- c. ~~Fireplaces, not exceeding six feet in breadth, may extend not closer than three feet to any side lot line.~~
- b. Notwithstanding the provisions above, where any setback conflicts with the California Building Code, the more restrictive shall apply.
- c. See also Section XX regarding attached accessory structures.

Should the provisions for projections of eaves, etc. into yards be simplified?



URBAN
PLANNING
PARTNERS
INC.

Open Uncovered Landings or Outside Stairways, Projecting Balconies

17.54.020 Projections into yards—Open porches or outside stairways, projecting balconies.

- a. Open, uncovered, landing places or outside stairways may extend a maximum of two (2) feet into any required side yard and five (5) feet into any required front or rear yard, provided they do not exceed six (6) feet in height (excluding railings) above ground level project not closer than four feet to any side lot line, and not exceeding six feet into any required rear yard.
- b. Projecting balconies located on rear elevations may extend a maximum of five (5) feet into the require rear yard.
- c. Requirements for decks are contained in Section 17.50.020(D).

Comment: Proposed change simplifies the setbacks, is more consistent with setbacks for other projections, and includes a height limit to preclude outside stairways to second floors.

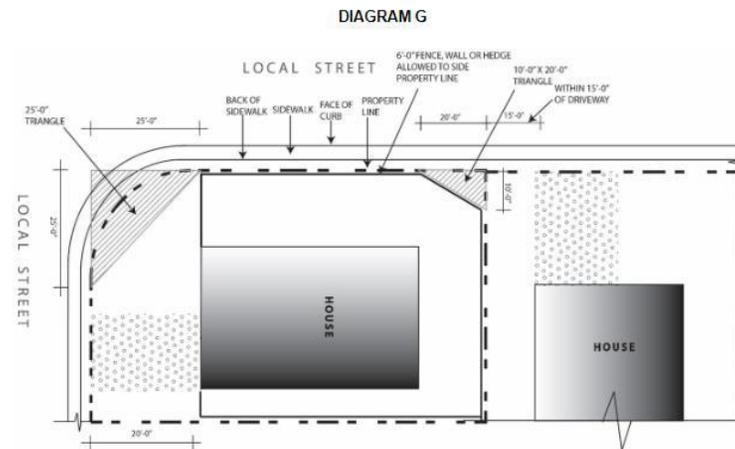
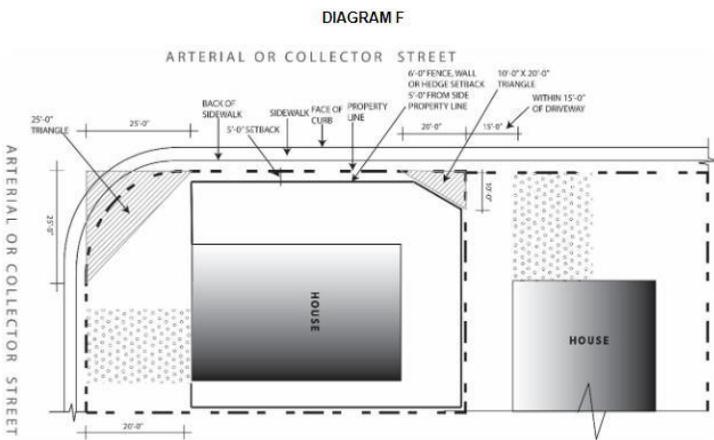
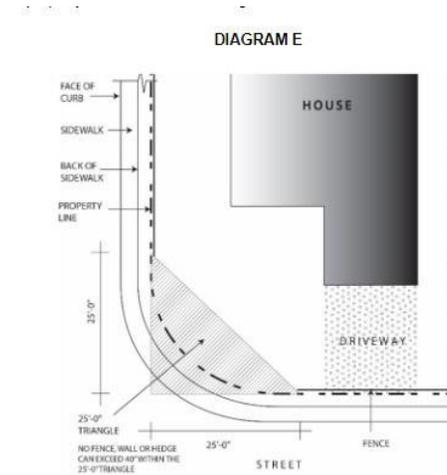
Should the provisions for projections of open porches or outside stairways into yards be simplified and preclude outside stairways to second floors?



Yards: Vision Triangles

- Vision triangles. No accessory structure or other obstruction more than 40 inches in height shall be located in the corner vision triangles of corner lots established in Section 17.52.030.

Comment: Staff requested a section to clarify that not just fences, but other obstructions are also prohibited from vision triangles.



Front Setback in Previously Developed Areas

~~In any "R" district, where four or more lots in a block have been improved with buildings at the time of the passage of the ordinance codified in this title (not including accessory buildings), the minimum required front setback shall be the average of the improved lots, if the setback is less than the stated requirements of the districts. Where the existing front yard is less than the stated requirements of the R-1 zoning district, the required front yard shall be the average depth of the front yards on the improved lots adjoining the side lines of the subject lot.~~

Comment: This section allows streets developed with smaller front setbacks to maintain those setbacks without being considered legal nonconforming.



Front Yard Trellis

Proposed Standard:

17.54.020.C.1.c. The only detached accessory buildings or structures allowed within the front yard shall be a trellis that is set back a minimum of twenty feet from the front property line and **not more than twelve (12) square feet in area located parallel to and adjacent to a fence that is more than forty inches in height.**

Should only one trellis be allowed? Should the size be limited to 12 square feet? Should the trellis be required to be set back a minimum of 20 feet?



Yards: Mechanical Equipment

Proposed Standards:

B. Mechanical equipment such as ~~The community development director shall have the discretion to allow an encroachment into the usually required five-foot side yard setback by up to two feet to allow the placement of~~ air conditioning condenser units, heat pumps, water heaters, or other mechanical/plumbing equipment may be located in side or rear yards when:

- (1) ~~The equipment is located behind and lower than a fence or wall; the walls of the houses sharing a common side yard property line are a minimum of fifteen feet apart; and~~
- (2) ~~The equipment is set back a minimum of three (3) feet from the property line;~~
- (3) The noise levels produced by the mechanical unit are in compliance with the provisions of subsection B, Noise Limits (Table 1) of Section 17.68.030, Noise, of Chapter 17.68, General Performance Standards; ~~and~~
- (4) ~~The mechanical unit is in compliance with Building Code requirements, including but not limited to setbacks. Air conditioning condenser units placed less than five feet from a side property line in accordance with this section shall require an architectural review permit consistent with the provisions of Chapter 17.58, Architectural Control and Supervision, of the Foster City Municipal Code.~~



Attached Accessory Structures: Patio Covers

~~Projections into yards—Patio covers—Attached accessory structures.~~

- A. An accessory structure is considered attached if any component of the structure is within 12 inches of the primary dwelling.
- B. All attached accessory structures shall comply with setback and other requirements for the main building, ~~except that a~~ patio cover unenclosed on at least two sides to serve the ground floor shall be allowed to extend into the ~~required~~ rear yard area, provided that:
 - 1. The size of the patio cover shall not exceed fifty percent of the rear yard area measured from the rear of the main structure to the rear property line;
 - ~~2. provided that~~ Such patio cover shall not extend more than twenty feet from the rear of the main structure and
 - ~~3. and provided that a~~ A minimum rear yard setback of five feet shall be maintained.
- C. All ~~patio covers attached accessory structures~~ shall maintain the following standards:
 - 1. No use of any structure extending into the rear yard area shall be permitted above the first floor.
 - 2. No ~~patio cover attached accessory structure~~ shall be enclosed to form a living or storage area ~~when used as a portion of the rear yard setback requirements unless it complies with all requirements and standards for a room addition.~~
 - 3. The only plumbing facilities to be permitted on any patio area shall be a ~~cold~~ water faucet and drain, ~~gas for cooking~~, and rainwater runoff disposal plumbing, and there shall be no other plumbing of any kind.
 - 4. Ingress and egress shall be directly from the living unit which the patio is designed to serve.

An accessory structure is considered attached if any component of the structure is within 12 inches of the main building.

Comment: This would allow a freestanding patio cover/ pergola to be structurally independent but not have to meet the 5' separation requirement that applies to detached accessory structures.



Front Yard: Paving

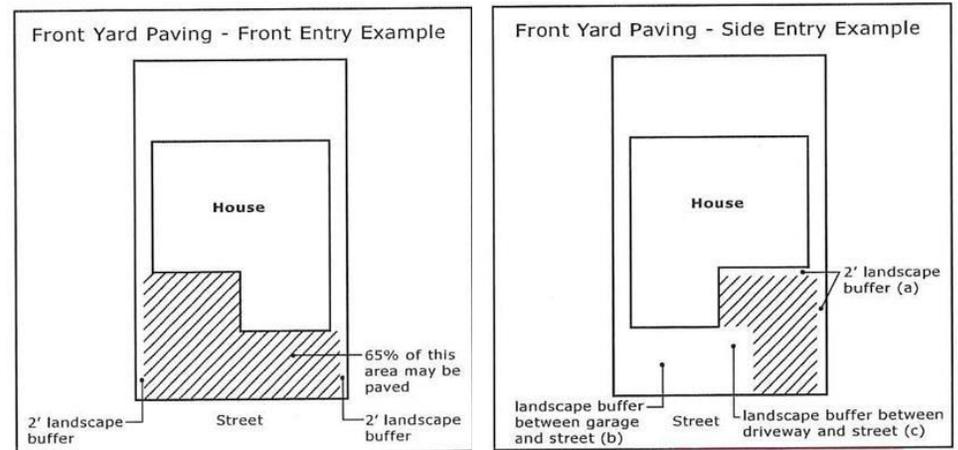
Proposed Standards:

Paving.

- i. Front yard paving shall maintain a minimum setback of two (2) feet from any side property line.
- ii. Where the garage entry faces the street, front yard paving (including the driveway) shall not exceed sixty-five (65) percent of the total front yard area.
- iii. For side entry garages, the area between the side of the garage facing the street and the front property line parallel to the street shall be entirely landscaped.

Should the existing 65% front yard paving limit for front entry garages be moved from Architectural and Solar Design Guidelines to Title 17?

Standards from ASGL:



URBAN
PLANNING
PARTNERS
INC.

Front Yard: Landscaping

Proposed Standards:

Landscaping.

i. All portions of front yards and street side yards, except those occupied by walkways and allowable motor vehicle parking and storage areas, shall be landscaped according to the following standards:

- 1) A minimum of one (1) tree per property with an estimated mature height of at least twelve (12) feet.
- 2) Ground area shall be covered with plantings, mulch, or inorganic ground cover.
- 3) Property shall be maintained in conformance with Chapter 9.52 Property Maintenance.

Comment: Some cities establish a percentage limit on coverage by inorganic material.

Should there be a maximum percentage of front yard coverage by inorganic material? If so, what should it be?



Lighting

Proposed Standards:

Exterior lighting shall be subject to the following restrictions:

- a. Light fixtures shall be mounted no higher than the roof eave.
- b. All light fixtures mounted more than four feet from grade shall be directed downward.
- c. A motion-activated light may be used if the beam is directed downwards, shielding the light from reaching adjacent properties.
- d. No permanently installed outdoor lights that blink, revolve, flash, or change intensity shall be permitted.
- e. Ground mounted lighting shall be limited to four (4) feet tall.
- f. Seasonal or holiday lighting shall be limited to sixty (60) days.

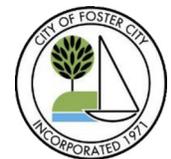


Lighting

Are the proposed standards appropriate?

Should string lights be restricted?

Should tree lights be restricted?



Fences: Front Courtyards

Proposed Standards:

Front yard fences or walls on noncorner lots are allowed to be six feet in height if:

- a. The fence or wall is set back a minimum of twenty feet from the back of sidewalk; ~~and in all instances placed far enough from the street such that the amount of landscaped area visible from the street is generally consistent with other lots located in the same block;~~ and
- b. ~~The fence's location does not obstruct pedestrian or vehicular access to the house and does not block the view of the house from the street;~~ and
- c. ~~The fence's location is not closer to the street than the house's primary front wall nearest to the street from which the fence is extended;~~ and
- d. ~~The fence is constructed of fifty percent open-air materials shown in Section 17.52.040;~~ and
- e. ~~The fence's design, location and orientation shall be subject to review and approval by the community development director;~~ and
- c. All items stored or temporarily placed behind the fence shall be lower than the height of the fence.
- d. Gates to a front courtyard would be subject to existing regulations for front yard fences.



Fences: Front Courtyards



Fences: Front Courtyards

- **Should fences and walls be allowed to create courtyards in the front of the house?**
- **If yes:**
 - **Should 6' height limit be changed to 5'?**
 - **Should requirement for fences to be 50% open be removed?**
 - **Should both fences and walls be allowed?**
 - **Should the color be required to match the house walls?**



Fences in Front Yards of Corner Lots

Proposed Standards:

A. Fences. In all residential zoning districts, fences may be permitted in the front yard area of corner lots if all of the following conditions are met:

1. The fence does not exceed forty inches in height; and
2. The fence is constructed of materials allowed by Section 17.52.040.

Should corner lots be allowed to have a front yard fence with a maximum height of 40 inches (same as non-corner lots)?

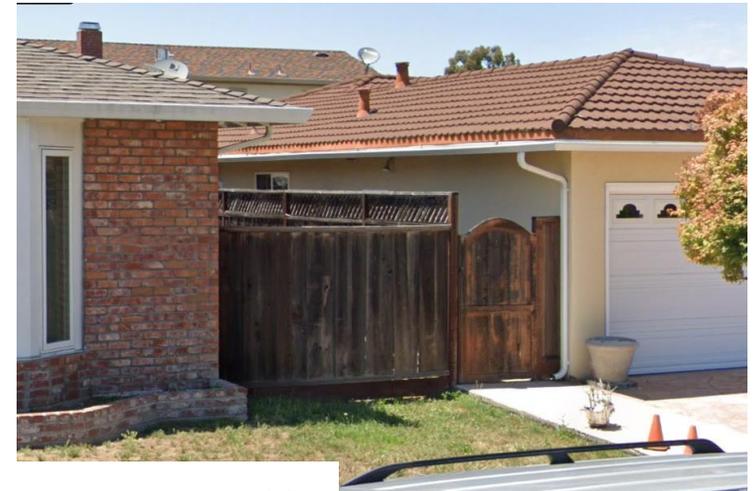


Fences in Side & Rear Yards of Nonwaterfront Noncorner Lots and Side Yards of Waterfront Lots

Proposed Standards:

5. Exception. Wood fences not exceeding seven feet in height may be permitted in any side yard area of a nonwaterfront corner lot if all fence material above six feet in height consists of wood lattice with a weave that is approximately fifty percent open.

Should a maximum height of 6 feet and 1 foot of 50 percent open fencing be allowed for side yard and rear fences on non-waterfront lots and side yard fences of waterfront lots?



Fences in Side Yards of Nonwaterfront Corner lots

Proposed Standards:

5. Exception. Wood fences not exceeding seven feet in height may be permitted in any side yard area of a nonwaterfront corner lot if all fence material above six feet in height consists of wood lattice with a weave that is approximately fifty percent open.



Should a maximum height of 6 feet and 1 foot of 50 percent open fencing be allowed for side yard fences on non-waterfront corner lots?



Fences: Materials

Proposed Standards:

- C. Materials for construction of permanent fences and walls along property lines shall be limited to the following: redwood, cedar, brick, slumpstone, stucco, plaster, cement, wrought iron, or similar materials as determined by the community development director. Additionally, clear tempered glass or clear Plexiglas shall be allowed ~~on~~ within rear and side yards of all properties and along property lines of waterfront properties only. Chain-link and wood or synthetic slats (e.g., vinyl slats) and vinyl may be allowed for commercial, industrial or institutional uses, depending on location and design.

Should the list of allowed and prohibited materials be altered? Should the Community Development Department maintain a list of allowed/prohibited materials? Examples of prohibited materials: barbed wire, electric wire.

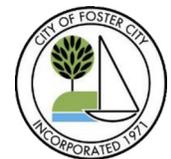


Windscreens

Proposed Standards:

A windscreen shall be allowed in a side or rear yard subject to the following:

- a. Windscreens shall be constructed of clear tempered glass or other clear rigid material.
- b. Windscreens may include a frame not to exceed 6 inches in width.
- c. Maximum height shall be up to ten (10) feet above grade or above the top of a first floor deck.
- d. Windscreens shall maintain a setback of at least five (5) feet from any property line or public walkway easement.
- e. Windscreens shall be limited to two sides, i.e., shall not enclose a space on three or more sides.



Windscreens



Windscreens

Should windscreens be required to be set back at least five feet from a property line or public walkway easement?

Should there be a limit on the length of a windscreen, i.e., a percentage of a property width?

Should windscreens be limited to one or two sides only to prevent creating a room?



**URBAN
PLANNING
PARTNERS
INC.**

Foster City Eichlers (1964-1966)

- Eichler Homes Built: 235
- Architect(s): Claude Oakland and John Brooks Boyd



URBAN
PLANNING
PARTNERS
INC.

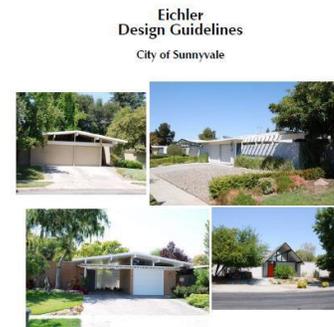
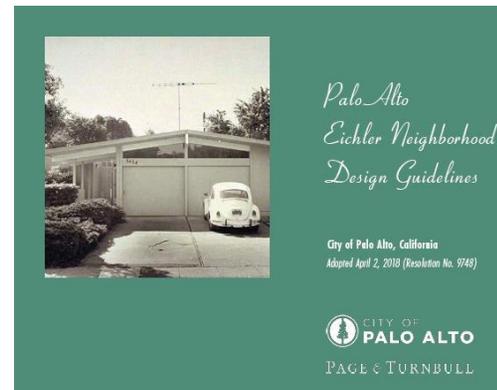
Foster City Eichlers (1964-1966)



Eichler Guidelines and Standards Examples

- Examples of different approaches:
 - Historic Districts:
 - Orange (2019) and San Jose (draft 2024)
 - Includes both objective standards and guidelines
 - Distinguishes between contributing and non-contributing properties
 - Guidelines: Palo Alto (2018), Sunnyvale (2009)

Note: above guidelines and standards developed by Page & Turnbull following extensive public engagement.



Eichler Guidelines and Standards Examples: Items Covered

- Building features covered:
 - Roofs
 - Exterior cladding materials
 - Carports
 - Garage doors
 - Exterior doors
 - Windows
 - Mechanical systems
 - Additions and accessory structures
 - Front yards
 - Driveways, walkways and paved surfaces
 - Fences & walls

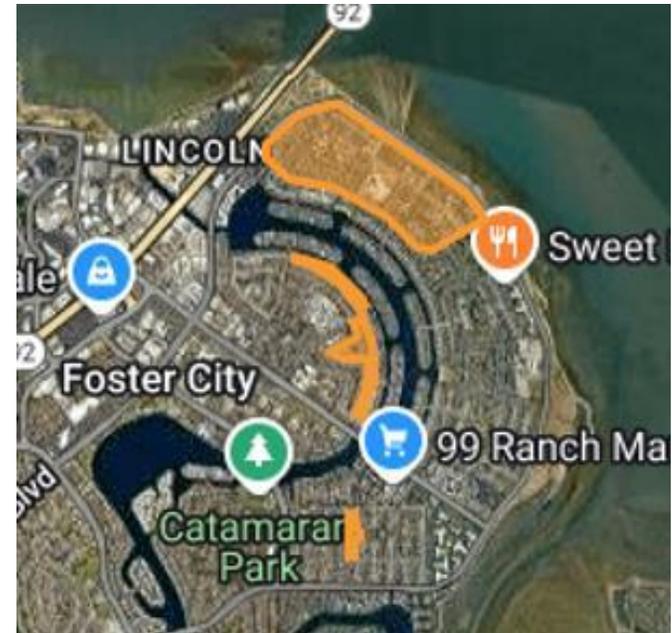


Eichler Design

The Eichlers in Foster City were built contemporaneously with the Eichler homes in Burlingame's Mills Estates in the mid-1960s and are represented by a variety of models by architects Claude Oakland and John Brooks Boyd.

Foster City Eichlers were designed specifically for the project and range in size from modest 3-bedroom homes of just under 1800 square feet to larger 4-bedroom models with more than 2200 square feet of living space. The Eichler homes in Foster City include courtyard, atrium, and gallery style floor plans.

Foster City Eichler homes are mixed with homes built by other developers, creating a diversity of style and architecture in these neighborhoods.



Source: <https://www.eichlerforsale.com/foster-city-eichlers/>



Eichler Design: Roofs

Proposed Standards:

The shape, pitch, and height of the original roof shall be preserved except that covers over atria may not exceed ten (10) inches of additional height.

If part of the original design, exposed beam ends and overhanging eaves shall be preserved.

Should filling in existing roof openings be allowed?

If so, is a limit of 10 inches for atria covers acceptable?

Should overhanging eaves and exposed beam ends be preserved?



Eichler Design: Roofing Materials

Comment:

Roofing materials used originally included:

- Rolled roofing
- Tar and gravel
- Membrane roofing
- Foam
- Built-up roofing
- Asphalt shingles on pitched roofs

Some cities prohibit:

- Tile
- Metal
- Slate
- Woof or metal shingles

White foam or membrane roofing on pitched roofs can appear “wavy” or uneven.

Should white be prohibited on roofs that are more than a specified pitch?

Should non-original type materials be prohibited?



Eichler Design: Siding Materials

Comment:

Using materials that are not characteristic of the Eichler designs can degrade the cohesiveness of the design.

Some cities prohibit these materials unless they were part of the original design:

- Stucco
- Stone
- Brinck
- Shingles
- Synthetic materials

Should some types of siding materials be prohibited unless part of the original design?



URBAN
PLANNING
PARTNERS
INC.

Eichler Design: Windows

Proposed Standards:

Clerestory and transom windows or openings on front facades above carports or garages shall not be infilled.

Windows added to the front façade shall match existing front façade windows in terms of type, opening style, frame color, and frame width.

The following window styles or treatments are prohibited on front or street side facing facades:

- Shutters
- Projecting bay or garden windows
- Mullions or divided lites (grids)

Should clerestory and transom windows on the front façade not be infilled?

Should windows added to the front façade match existing front façade windows?

Should window styles added to the front façade that are not characteristic of Eichlers be prohibited?



URBAN
PLANNING
PARTNERS
INC.

Eichler Design: Garages and Carports

Comment:

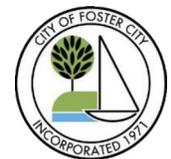
Some cities prohibit infilling of carports to maintain the original architectural character.

Some styles of garage doors can negatively impact the appearance and do not fit with the Eichler style.

Some cities prohibit certain styles of garage doors such as raised/recessed panels, curved windows, divided windows, or diagonal or horizontal siding.

Should enclosing carports be prohibited?

Should the style of garage doors be limited, such as prohibiting raised/recessed panel doors, divided windows, curved windows, or diagonal or horizontal siding?



Eichler Design: Mechanical Equipment

Proposed Standards:

Mechanical equipment shall not be roof mounted.

Any exterior conduits shall be painted to match the surrounding surface.

Conduits or ducts located on the roof shall be no higher than six (6) inches above the roof surface and on roofs that are less than 2:12 pitch.

Should there be restrictions on roof-mounted equipment, conduits, and ducts?



First Floor Additions to Eichler Homes

First-floor room additions are subject to the following requirements:

- i. Located in the side or rear of the existing house.
- ii. Set back a minimum of 10 feet from the front facade of the house.
- iii. Roof form shall duplicate the roof form of the existing house.
- iv. Height shall be no taller than one story with maximum floor height (to top plate) of eight (8) feet.
- v. Shall comply with all other adopted design standards for Eichler houses.



Are the proposed standards acceptable?



URBAN
PLANNING
PARTNERS
INC.

Second Floor Additions to Eichler Homes

Second-floor room additions are subject to the following requirements:

- i. Limited to the rear half of the roof.
- ii. Cladding shall match the primary material of the existing house.
- iii. Roof form shall duplicate the roof form of the existing house.
- iv. Floor height shall be limited (to top plate) of eight (8) feet.
- v. Shall comply with all other adopted design standards for Eichler houses.



Are the proposed standards acceptable?





Provide Your Feedback!

<https://engagefostercity.org/single-family-objective-design-and-development-standards>



Home / Single-Family Objective Design and Development Standards

Until May 8, 2025



City of Foster City

Part 1 Draft Regulations: Provide your Feedback!

[Part 1 Draft Regulations: Single-Family Objective Design and Development Standards](#)

Single-family Objective Design and Development Standards is a Citywide initiative to engage the community in an endeavor to modernize the City's single-family design guidelines, policies, and applicable zoning code regulations into one comprehensive document called: **"Single-Family Objective Design and Development Standards."**

On April 17, 2025, the Planning Commission will hold a study session to discuss part 1 of the draft regulations for Site Design, Building Design, and Accessory structures. Your continued engagement is essential for this process ([see link for meeting details](#)).

Please review the draft regulations below and share your feedback until May 8, 2025.

You have three (3) options:

Option #1: Provide your comments on specific regulations.

Option #2: Provide your general comments.

Option #3: Provide general and specific comments.

Next



URBAN
PLANNING
PARTNERS
INC.