

M99-002 - Planning Director's Special Permit Design Issues

SUMMARY/BACKGROUND:

All of the North Natomas Planned Unit Developments (PUDs) approved to date make provision for staff-level approval of single family and two family residences through the Planning Director's Special Permit (PDSP) process. At this time, staff is reviewing four PDSP applications, including Beazer Homes (P98-130) and Kaufman & Broad (P99-002) in Gateway West PUD and Centex (P98-136 & P98-137) in Northborough and Northpointe Park PUDs. In reviewing these applications, several issues have been raised:

- The interpretation of PUD Guidelines which use terms such as "encourage" and "should" with reference to desired design elements, and the degree to which staff has the discretion to require such elements.
- Conformity with Single Family Residential Design Principles adopted by the Planning Commission in January, 1998.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: Staff recommends that the Planning Commission provide direction to staff regarding the issues raised in this staff report.

STAFF COMMENTS:

In creating the PDSP process, it was intended that the staff review would facilitate the development process by creating a streamlined permitting mechanism which would primarily serve to ensure project consistency with adopted PUD Guidelines. In reviewing the applications received to date, a number of design issues have been identified which are related either to design features which are "encouraged" but not required by the PUD Guidelines, or are not addressed at all by the various PUDs.

Staff wants to ensure that the PDSP process upholds the same high standards which the Planning Commission uses in reviewing residential projects. These standards are embodied in the Single Family Residential Design Principles, the North Natomas Community Plan, North Natomas Development Guidelines, the PUD Guidelines, and in precedent established by previously approved projects. Since the applications which are currently before staff for review are the first PDSPs under this new process, staff is seeking direction whether the approach proposed by staff is appropriate and is consistent with Planning Commission standards.

General issues raised by staff with regard to the residential projects currently under review include:

- Garage dominance of front elevations

- Definition/clarification of "active living areas" for the placement of such uses at street-facing windows
- Enhancement of blank side/rear elevations which can be viewed from public streets or other areas
- Need for variation from plan to plan and elevation to elevation

Garage dominance of front elevations

A number of the plans submitted to staff include garages which comprise more than 50% of the width of the front elevation and which project forward of the porch/facade of the house by more than 5 feet (sometimes as much as 20 feet or more). In other parts of the City, staff has advised applicants (at Planning Commission direction) to design homes such that half or more of the plans feature garages which are flush with the front of the house or recessed behind the front of the house, while the remaining plans may have garages which project no more than five feet in front of the house. In most of the recently approved PUDs in South Natomas, this is a requirement of the PUD Guidelines. However, in North Natomas, these provisions have not been made mandatory requirements in the PUDs.

Lennar Communities, the developer of Northpointe Park, Northborough and Parkway Plaza (collectively known as "Natomas Park") has developed guidelines used internally by the company to review prospective client-builders' home plans. Their guidelines include some helpful mitigation ideas for protruding front garages. Lennar allows some plans to have garages forward, ranging from one-half to two-thirds of the plans offered in a village. The remaining plans must have recessed garages, have a porch or courtyard element forward of the garage, or have detached or side access garages.

Several of the PUD Guidelines allow side-turned garages (garages with entrances which are perpendicular to the street, and accessed by curved driveways). The advantage of this design is that it mitigates the front view of a garage door, usually placing a window facing the street. Builders sometimes prefer this design solution because it allows them to use existing floor plans which were designed with front-facing protruding garages, requiring only a minor change by moving the garage door from the front to the side of the garage. While staff generally does not object to this design treatment, it does have some drawbacks, and should be used to a limited extent. Because curved driveways are required for side-entry garages, much of the front yard area ends up being paved rather than landscaped. Also, the garage and driveway still are featured more prominently than the rest of the front of the house. Staff recommends that side-entry garages be limited to 25 percent of the plans submitted for each PDSP.

Active living areas

The Single Family Residential Design Principles call for "active use windows (i.e., living room, kitchen) facing the street." A number of the plans submitted include only bedroom windows facing the street. Some ambiguity arises over bedrooms which can optionally be used as

home offices or dens, areas which may be considered active living areas. It is staff's intent to require plans to include at least one active use room to have a view onto the street, unless there is a justifiable design objective which requires living areas to face the rear yard area (such as lakefront homes). Justifiable design objectives include designs which encourage a sense of community similar to the front porch/public street interface. It is understood that "active living areas" include living/family rooms, kitchens, dining areas and similar gathering places, but do not include bedrooms and bathrooms.

A related issue concerns some home plans submitted to staff which place the front door in a recessed "niche" or entryway, which in turn is further set back from the front of the garage by a courtyard area. This design places the entry far from the street and creates a "tunnel like" effect, conflicting with the principle that entries should be visible from the street and the street should be visible from the entry.

Enhancement of side/rear elevations

Production housing typically reserves enhanced building materials and elevation treatments such as varied roof lines for the front of the house only. Typical side and rear elevations consist of unvaried roof lines, boxy massing, plain stucco wall finishes, and windows without trim. While it makes sense to focus design attention and higher quality finishes where they are most noticeable (such as the public "face" of a building), there are situations where side and rear elevations are visible from public areas. In most of the PUDs in North Natomas, at least some of the lots side onto or back up to major roads, public parks, open space areas, and detention basins/lakes. In these situations, it is staff's intention to condition approvals so that the same quality of finish, variation in massing, and changes in roof line is used on side and rear elevations visible to public areas.

Typical production housing often does not provide for special street side elevation treatments. Instead, the typical view along suburban street side yard areas is of a wooden fence partially obscuring an unadorned side elevation. This may lead to a street scene along some streets which have primarily side-on lots which is dominated by blank fences, rather than active living areas. In classic neighborhoods, by contrast, homes often are situated so that windows provide views on to side street areas and the elevations are of equal quality on both front and street side elevations. Staff suggests that corner lots have either enhanced versions of the typical interior lot homes which present improved elevations to the street side yard area. Also, the fence line along the side street should begin at the back rear corner of the house, leaving the street side yard open for views from the house to the street, or special models (which address these concerns) should be developed just for corner lots.

Variation in plans and elevations

An important consideration in reviewing production housing is the effort made to vary the designs which will likely be repeated 20 to 50 times in the same subdivision. The first type of variation is the house plan. Different house plans are distinguished from each other by

their varying size, floor plans, and (most importantly, from the public perspective) exterior design. Unfortunately, some builders choose to save money by taking a basic plan and adding to or slightly modifying the floor plan to create two or three different plans with substantially the same roof line, window pattern, front door location, porch size/style and other features. The second type of variation is in the elevation schemes offered for each house plan. These can range from relatively minor changes such as wood siding versus stucco, brick veneer versus stone veneer, or windows with or without shutters to more significant changes such as varied roof lines, porch size/location changes, and varied window patterns (size, shape, location). It is staff's intent to require that overly similar plans and elevations be modified to require varied roof lines or other substantial changes which differentiate the facades.

Comparison of Submitted Projects

The following is a brief review of the specific design issues associated with the individual residential projects submitted to date:

Table 1
Centex Homes at Northborough Village 5 (P98-136)
Typical Lot Size - 55' x 105' (5,775 sf) (69 lots)

Plan #	# Stories	# Bedrooms (# / optional)	Garage Stalls	Square Footage (House/ Garage/ Porch)	Porch ?	Recessed Garage ?	% Lot Coverage
4	1	3	2	(1,773 / 472 / 72)	Y	N	40.1%
5	1	3	3	(1,960 / 617 / 45)	Y	N	45.4% ¹
6	1	4/1	3	(2,406 ² / 601 / 75)	Y	N	32.9%
7	2	3/2	3	(2,512 ³ / 614 / 58)	Y	N	34.3%

Notes- 1- The lot coverage is 44.6 % with the porch allowance of 45 sf.

2- The first floor square footage used to calculate lot coverage is 1,226 sf.

3- The first floor square footage used to calculate lot coverage is 1309 sf.

Table 2
Centex Homes at Northpointe Park Village 5 (P98-137)
 Typical Lot Size - 45' x 105' (4,725 sf) (73 lots)

Plan #	# Stories	# Bedrooms (# / optional)	Garage Stalls	Square Footage (House/ Garage/ Porch)	Porch ?	Recessed Garage ?	% Lot Coverage
1	1	3	2	(1,400 / 406 / 186)	Y	Flush w/ porch	42.2%
2	2	3	2	(1,603 ¹ / 437 / 98)	Y	N	29.8%
3	2	4	3 T	(1,922 ² / 633 / 93)	Y	N	36.5%

Notes- T means that one of the stalls is a tandem stall.

1- The first floor square footage used to calculate lot coverage is 871 sf.

2- The first floor square footage used to calculate lot coverage is 997 sf.

Table 3
Beazer Homes at Gateway West Villages 5, 7, and 8 (P98-130)
 Typical Lot Size - 45' x 105' (4,725 sf) (100 lots)

Plan #	# Stories	# Bedrooms (# / optional)	Garage Stalls	Square Footage (House/ Garage/ Porch)	Porch ?	Recessed Garage ?	% Lot Coverage
1	1	3	2	((1,232 / 426 / 90)	Y	N	36.9%
2	1	3	2	(1,441 / 439 / 0)	N - bay window	Flush w/ bay window	39.7%
3	1	4	2	(1,659 / 460 / 128)	Y	N	47.5% ¹

Notes- 1 - The lot coverage is 44.8 % with the porch allowance of 128 sf.

Table 4
Kaufman and Broad at Gateway West Villages 4 and 9 (P99-002)
Typical Lot Size - 60' x 105' (6,300 sf) (138 lots)

Plan #	# Stories	# Bedrooms (# / optional)	Garage Stalls	Square Footage (House/ Garage/ Porch)	Porch ?	Recessed Garage ?	% Lot Coverage
1	1	4	2/3opt	(1,634 / 443 / 75)	Y	N-side-on	34.1%
2	1	4	2/3 opt	(1,820 / 468 / 90)	Y	N	37.7%
3	2	4	2	(1,969 ¹ / 435 / 100)	Y	N	24.8%
4	2	4	2/3opt	(2,183 ² / 407 / 44)	Y	Flush with porch	23.2%
5	2	4	3/2opt	(2,323 ³ / 610 / 60)	Y	Behind porch	29.3%
6	2	5	3	(2,543 ⁴ / 705 / 60)	Y	N-side-on	33.2%

Notes- 1- The first floor square footage used to calculate lot coverage is 1,027 sf.

2- The first floor square footage used to calculate lot coverage is 1,010 sf.

3- The first floor square footage used to calculate lot coverage is 1,174 sf. With options the floor area is 2,483 sf.

4- The first floor square footage used to calculate lot coverage is 1,328 sf. With options the floor area is 3,280 sf.

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Attachments

- Attachment 1 Typical PUD garage language
- Attachment 2 Typical PUD building design language
- Attachment 3 Alleghany PUD garage language
- Attachment 4 Gateway West PUD streetscape language

Attachment 1 Typical PUD garage language**C. Setbacks and Building Orientation**

Setbacks will vary for maximum flexibility, but with a goal of creating a comfortable street edge for pedestrians. Setbacks are designed so that porches can be encouraged -- to bring the "social" part of the home closer to the sidewalk.

The porch will be allowed to within 12'-6" of the front property line (from back of walk) or, in the case of split sidewalk, 7'-6" from back of walk.

1) Conventional-Shape Lots: The goal is to bring homes closer to the street while maintaining a comfortable street edge. For conventional-size lots (i.e. 40' x 105' to 60' x 105'), the following setbacks are allowed:

a) Porch: On streets without split sidewalk, the recommended porch setback shall be 12'-6" minimum from back of walk. On streets with split sidewalk, the setback may be reduced by 5'-0" consistent with the public utility easement, to a minimum of 7'-6".

b) Front of Building: On streets without split sidewalk, the recommended setback to the front of the home, excluding porch, shall be 17'-6" minimum from back of walk; on streets with split sidewalk, 12'-6" minimum from back of walk. Deeper front yard setbacks may be required for cul-de-sac lots.

c) Side Yard: The allowed setback is 5'-0" minimum on each side, with the exception of zero-lot line conditions, which shall be 5'-0" and 0". Detached garages and/or attached garages which are recessed a minimum of 50'-0" from the front property line, may have a 0'-0" side yard setback, and must comply with Building Code.

d) Rear Yard: The recommended setback is 15'-0" minimum, or zero for detached garages and accessory dwelling units ("granny flats"), and must comply with Building Code.

e) Garage Setbacks: The goal is to reduce the impact of the garage and driveway on the streetscape, while providing adequate off-street parking. For front drives, the recommended minimum setback is 7'-0" or less from back of curb, or 19'-0" or more from back of walk. For alley conditions, the recommended minimum setback is 16'-0" from the center of the alley. See Exhibit 18. Alleys shall be 20' in width.

Attachment 2 Typical PUD building design language**F. Building Design****1) Architectural Standards**

Architectural variety is important and is strongly encouraged. The use of different "styles" and materials is intended to add variety to the buildings just as is most often found in towns that have evolved over time. To balance this diversity, the public design features -- street landscaping, visible fencing, arcades, entries, esplanades, and public buildings -- will be treated with an eye to unity and consistency. These architectural parameters apply to all lots, but are intended to control only those aspects which directly affect the public areas.

2) Model Variations

In order to prevent the appearance of discrete "villages" and promote the sense of a whole community, each home builder must develop as much variety in design as possible within each village. The NPDRC may require a minimum number of models, elevations, and material variations.

For 50-100 homes, three models and three elevations of each model are required. For fewer than 50 homes, this may be reduced to two models and three elevations of each model. For greater than 100 homes, this may be increased to four models and three elevations of each model. The different models should exploit the possibilities of variation of design as well as floor plan. It is recognized that for higher-density single-family areas, it may be desirable to have greater design consistency.

Elevation variations should expand on these differences with differing porch treatments, window design, exterior wall materials, roofing materials, and bay treatments. For example, elevation variation should use different architectural styles, building massings and details, as well as different facade and roof designs.

3) Porches and Entries

Porches are encouraged to create a buffer and human-scale layer between the sidewalk and the house, and a social edge to the private dwelling in which people can choose to "see and be seen" along the neighborhood streets.

Setbacks have been adjusted to allow for porches and to encourage variety along the street. The porch should provide space for the primary entrance to the house and be covered by a roof. In order to be fully utilized, the recommended size for porches is 5'-0" deep, and 10'-0" in length. It is recommended that the porch be

raised 8"-12" or at least one (1) step above adjacent grade. The porch can be integrated with second floor elements to provide balconies and decks. Various types of roof supports are encouraged.

4) Garages and Driveways

It is recommended that garage doors have a 12" minimum recess from the frame, to create a shadow and further architectural interest.

"Hollywood-style" driveways are allowed. For single-car driveways, this consists of two hard paved tire paths, 2'-0" to 3'-0" wide, separated by a landscaped strip at least 2'-6" wide. For double-car driveways, the "Hollywood" drive consists of a landscaped strip at least 2'-6" wide between the two driveways.

For garages accessed via an alley, a minimum 2'-0" landscape strip is recommended between the fence and the alley. Also, light fixtures must be mounted onto garages so as to provide adequate lighting for alleys. An optional accessory dwelling or "granny flat" may be located above the garage, in compliance with the Building Code.

5) Roofs

The pitch of a roof shall be at least six feet (6') in twelve feet (12'), provided that the NPDRC may permit a roof with a pitch of less than six in twelve if the roof is harmonious with the overall design of the proposed improvement and is aesthetically pleasing to the NPDRC. The porch should be the same pitch as the house; flat roofs are to be avoided.

6) Projections and Bays

In order to encourage variety and scale in the facades, bays and projections will be permitted to encroach up to 3'-0" into the front yard building setback, and up to 2'-0" into the side yard building setback.

7) Units Backing on Major Streets

Units which back onto or side onto major streets and collector streets, and which are visible, promote some special concerns and considerations. Rear or side elevations visible from major roadways will receive special review by the NPDRC for adequate facade treatment. Window treatments, roof lines and materials should match front facade in appearance and quality.

Attachment 3 Alleghany PUD garage language**•Residential Building Setback Standards**

Single-Family Detached Residential (6-8 du/ac) Building Setbacks: The goal in setting strict standards for the building setbacks is to create a comfortable street edge for the pedestrian and to reduce the visual impact of the garage and car. In all cases, the porch or entry feature will bring the "social" part of the dwelling closer to the sidewalk and naturally recess the garage. The porch and entry will be allowed within 12'-6" of the front property line (or in the case of split sidewalk, from back of walk), with a maximum front yard setback of 15'-0". The purpose of a maximum setback is to maintain the consistency of the built edge of the street. The garage must be at least 5'-0" behind the building line. See Exhibit 37 (Figures A and B) on page 88.

Porch/Entry	12'-6" min.	15'-0" Max.
Building	17'-6" min.	23'-0" Max
Side Yard	5'-0" or 0' at detached garages ¹	
Rear Yard	20'-0" Min	

Single-Family Detached Residential (3-5 du/ac) Building Setbacks: The porch and entry will be allowed to within 15'-0" of the front property line, or in the case of split sidewalk, from the back of walk, with a maximum front yard setback of 20'-0". The purpose of a maximum setback is to maintain the consistency of the built edge of the street. The garage must be at least 5'-0" behind the building line. See Exhibit 37 (Figures C and D) on page 88.

Porch/Entry	15'-0" min.	20'-0" Max.
Building	20'-0" min.	25'-0" Max
Side Yard	7'-6" or 0' at detached garages	
Rear Yard	20'-0" Min.	

¹ Zero-lot line configurations are allowed on the side drive.

Attachment 4 Gateway West PUD Streetscape Language**C. Setbacks and Building Orientation**

Setbacks will vary for maximum flexibility, but with a goal of creating a comfortable street edge for pedestrians. Setbacks are designed so that porches can be encouraged -- to bring the "social" part of the home closer to the sidewalk. The porch will be allowed to within 12'-6" of the front property line (from back of walk) or, in the case of split sidewalk, 7'-6" from back of walk.

The goal of these Guidelines is to reduce the visual impact of garages on the streetscape, consistent with other goals such as diversity of housing type, and taking into account the special design considerations which may be required for various types of lots.

The above goal may be accomplished by a variety of means including but not limited to: garages which are detached or attached at or near the rear of units or lots; garages which are set back equal to or behind the non-garage facade or porch; units with forward garages which also include courtyards, arbors, arches or similar treatments to enhance the streetscape; or side-turned garages.

It is recognized that there are special circumstances such as the villages surrounding the lake in which it may not be possible or desirable to design units with recessed garages, in which case alternative treatments, including some listed above (i.e. courtyards, side-turned garages) shall be encouraged. It is also recognized that there can be a diversity of designs on a street -- some with garages recessed, some units with courtyards, some units with porches, and some units with garages forward.