

HEALTHY DESIGN GUIDELINES

LOS ANGELES COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF REGIONAL PLANNING

Objective Statement

In order to effectively promote physical activity, healthy design seeks safe, convenient and pleasant places for pedestrians and bicyclists by minimizing hazards, increasing accessibility, and overall enhancing the look and feel of the built environment.

The overall goal of Healthy Design is to improve public health through changes in the built environment. The Healthy Design Ordinance (“HDO”) proposes changes to existing zoning and subdivision regulations that will increase levels of physical activity, assisting in reducing the County’s rates of obesity. The purpose of this document is to establish a basic framework and identify design areas for the HDO process and successive County efforts in healthy design.

Definition of Healthy Design

Healthy Design is defined as features of the built environment that promote physical activity in the form of walking, bicycling and exercise.

Healthy Design Principles

Safety, Convenience, Pleasantness

- **Safety**: Safety is a primary need for everyone. People will be reluctant to walk, bike and exercise in a public setting if they do not feel safe. The principle of safety includes those aspects of the built environment that may pose immediate dangers for pedestrians and bicyclists, such as crossings at busy intersections, as well as those that may tend to degrade the perception of safety, such as poor lighting and lack of windows in building fronts.
- **Convenience**: Even if an area is safe, people may not be able to effectively move through or use an area by foot or bike. Convenience relates to efficiency, further encouraging physical activity by making it easier for people to walk, bike and exercise. It includes the idea of proximity, or how close everyday uses (such as home, work and shopping) are together in space, but also specific equipment and improvements such as bike racks, park exercise stations, and sidewalks. Convenience is also closely related to the idea of accessibility of a neighborhood, which is having daily needs readily available in one’s environment.
- **Pleasantness**: Pleasantness is needed to ensure the longer-term enjoyment of the environment and relates to the ideas of attractiveness and comfort. Ideal examples are street landscaping and park spaces, which, when designed appropriately, can cool temperatures (by providing shade and reducing the “urban heat island effect”) and provide relieving views from structures and pavement.

Healthy Design Features

Organized below are 12 general categories of healthy design features that more directly relate healthy design and its principles to the built environment. These features describe some of the key ways to achieve healthy design while acting as basic starting points for new planning policies and regulations for healthy design.

1. Pathways and trails: To make exercise more convenient in rural and suburban areas, standardize multi-purpose trail design so connector trails and trail amenities are provided at appropriate locations within private developments. Examples include improved signage at trail heads, fencing and directional signage along trail routes, benches, and public displays at historic or other points of interest. In suburban areas, place trails in “greenbelt” corridors that connect residences with recreational uses and other common destinations.
2. Mix of land uses: Integrate residential, commercial, office, and civic uses (such as schools, parks and transit stops) closer together at the neighborhood, block and building scale. At the neighborhood scale, arrange land uses in a “pedestrian shed” of ¼ to ½-mile walking distance and centered on a common destination such as a civic space or civic building, commercial center or transit station; at the block scale, include commercial, residential and office uses within the same block; and at the building scale, allow a wider range of everyday commercial uses such as bakeries, beauty salons and dry cleaners within buildings that have residential units.
3. Block design: To improve connectivity and accessibility, create standardized block designs and maximum perimeter lengths; make blocks smaller, with streets at more frequent intervals; in urban block designs, use rear lanes and alleys for alternative vehicle access, minimizing curb cuts on the street, and use alleys/rear lanes for trash and utilities to present a more attractive streetscape.
4. Street design: Better street designs can enhance safety, convenience and attractiveness. Modify road sections to provide “Complete Streets” allowing a greater variety of bike, pedestrian, transit and parking amenities and configurations that correlate to the surrounding land uses and zoning; and, to make existing streets safer for pedestrians, use standardized “traffic calming” devices such as grade-differentiated crosswalks, flashing signs, chicanes, roundabouts, dips and speed humps when appropriate.
5. Transit stops: To make transit use more convenient, include features in private developments such as shelters, benches, lockers, showers, bike parking, and improved signage that are located at or near bus and rail stops.
6. Parks and civic spaces: Create standardized typologies for open space such as parks, greens, squares, plazas and playgrounds that fit into rural, non-urban and urban contexts; to increase accessibility, integrate smaller open space areas into private developments at more frequent intervals in urban areas; and to encourage more routine use, further standardize open space designs to include facilities for exercise and dog owners.
7. Buildings: To improve safety and pedestrian access, place buildings closer to the sidewalk, with entrances and windows open and oriented toward the street; to increase

comfort and attractiveness, use features such as awnings and arcades over public sidewalks, and design building facades using proportions and materials appropriately scaled to the pedestrian.

8. Landscaping: To enhance comfort, use tree plantings at frequent intervals to provide more shade cover along pedestrian and bike routes, and ensure landscaping is provided next to the street to act as a buffer between pedestrians and vehicles, improving safety.
9. Parking: Reduce or eliminate minimum required parking standards in higher-density urban areas to encourage use of transit and/or shared parking and allow more space for other commercial, residential and/or civic uses; locate surface (off street) parking away from the sidewalk and street to enhance streetscape attractiveness, and standardize parking lot and parking structure designs to increase connectivity and comfort for pedestrians and bicyclists.
10. Walls, fences and porches: To increase attractiveness, use higher-quality building methods and materials (such as masonry stone, wood and wrought-iron) in walls and fences, and modify and/or establish wall, fence and front porch design, location and height standards so that these features better delineate public, semi-private and private spaces, increasing safety.
11. Lighting: Use street lights appropriate for the development context to improve overall safety and comfort, such as lower wattage and reduced-height light poles at more frequent intervals along busier residential and commercial streets.
12. Signs: Increase the attractiveness of the streetscape by using higher-quality construction methods and materials in commercial and advertising signs (such as a painted wood sign that has exterior lighting), and reduce the size of signs in urban areas so they are pedestrian-scale.

These guidelines are a tool to effectively address healthy design in the drafting of the HDO. Beyond the HDO, the guidelines will assist other County projects aimed at making the County an overall healthier place.