

LOS ANGELES COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF REGIONAL PLANNING

COUNTYWIDE HEALTHY DESIGN ORDINANCE GUIDELINES

SUMMARY

The intent of this document is to define healthy design, the three guiding principles which will lay the foundation for the preparation of a Healthy Design Ordinance (“HDO”) by Los Angeles County Regional Planning (“Regional Planning”), and begin to discuss examples that may be included within the HDO and the built environment.

BACKGROUND

On November 13, 2009, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (“Public Health”) released a report to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (“Board”) on a possible grant from the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (“CDC”) “Communities Putting Prevention to Work” initiative. The grant would aim to improve public health outcomes in the areas of fighting obesity and encouraging physical activity. To this end, the Board issued a motion to prepare a study that identifies healthy design features, including bicycle amenities, and encourages their inclusion in both private and public development projects in order to promote walking and other outdoor physical activities.

In March 19, 2010, Public Health announced the receipt of the CDC grant of approximately \$32 million over a two-year period for activities addressing obesity and physical activity. In April 2010, Regional Planning received the grant request from Public Health and began preparing a Scope of Work to draft a Healthy Design Ordinance (“HDO”) and select a consultant to aid in the effort. In June 2010, Regional Planning selected Alta Planning + Design as the HDO project consultant. Alta is also working with the County on its Bicycle Master Plan update. The final Scope of Work for the HDO is complete, and Regional Planning is moving forward with the HDO. The deadline to have the HDO adopted by the Board is March of 2012.

DEFINITION AND PRINCIPLES

Healthy design is defined as features of the built environment that promote physical activity in the form of walking, biking and exercise. The HDO promotes physical activity through three core principles that influence and encourage healthy design features in the built environment. The three principles are:

- **Principle 1:** *The built environment must be made safe for pedestrians and bicyclists by minimizing hazards and increasing the perception of safety.*
- **Principle 2:** *The built environment must be made convenient for pedestrians and bicyclists by improving connectivity and accessibility.*
- **Principle 3:** *The built environment must be made pleasant for pedestrians and bicyclists by increasing comfort and attractiveness.*

DESIGN FEATURES

Below are 12 basic design features that follow the three core principles along with specific examples of how they can be implemented within the built environment:

1. **Multi-purpose trails:** Standardize multi-purpose trail design so connector trails and trail amenities are provided at appropriate locations within private developments. Examples of design include improved signage at trail heads, fencing and directional signage along trail routes, benches, and public displays at historic or other points of interest.
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 when appropriate. Examples can include: 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 make blocks smaller, cut by streets at frequent intervals; in addition, use rear lanes and alleys in block designs for trash and utilities to make the streetscape more attractive as well as to provide alternative vehicle access.
4. Street design: Changes to street designs can enhance safety, convenience and attractiveness. Modify standardized road section design, widths and striping to allow 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.
5. Transit stops: To make transit use more convenient, include features such as shelters, benches, lockers, bike parking, and improved signage in private developments 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 use better construction methods and materials in facades.
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 on the curb 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 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 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 lighting designs appropriate for the development context to improve overall safety and comfort, such as reduced-height light poles with lower wattages along 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.

The above features are examples of healthy design. Each makes the built environment safer, more accessible, and/or more pleasurable for pedestrians and bicyclists.

CONCLUSION

These principles and design features are meant to guide County staff, the public and other agencies as changes to County standards are discussed, proposed and adopted as part of the HDO. They will aid outreach efforts with agencies, groups and community members. Hopefully they will also improve coordination with other ongoing Regional Planning efforts such as the Transit-Oriented District (“TOD”) update, Master Trails and Bikeways Plan Update, Zoning Ordinance Update Program (“ZOUPE”), community/area plan updates and the Countywide General Plan Update. The HDO’s coordination with the General Plan Update is especially critical since it proposes many policies that relate to healthy design. This document and the HDO itself may also prove useful to others who seek to adopt similar healthy design standards.