



Community Development Department Planning Division

COMMISSION-LEVEL DESIGN REVIEW

PURPOSE: The design review process ensures that new development will conform to City of Benicia General Plan policies. Through these policies, the City tries to preserve natural land forms and existing vegetation, protect views and promote attractive, compatible architectural design.

WHEN REQUIRED: Nearly all projects that involve new construction, exterior alterations, repainting and additions require design approval by the City prior to issuance of a zoning permit. Site plans, architecture, landscaping and parking are all considered in this process. Design review can take place concurrently with other discretionary permit applications. Design review is conducted by either the Historic Preservation Review Commission or the Community Development Director. The Historic Preservation Review Commission reviews the following projects:

- All projects involving 2,500 sq. ft. or more of floor area (other than single-family homes) in the CG, CN, CW, CO, RS (nonresidential structures only), RM, RH, OS, PS and PD districts.
- All projects in the H overlay district involving demolition, construction, or changes in material (except non-historic residences in the enclave and other exemptions as noted in the Historic Conservation Plan).

If a project does not fall into one of the above categories, it will require staff-level design review. Information on that process may be found in a separate information sheet entitled "Staff-Level Design Review". Information on the design review process for historic single-family homes in the H (Historic) overlay districts may also be found in separate information sheets.

PRE-APPLICATION REVIEW: Design review consists of two steps. The first is pre-application review between the project sponsor and planning staff to discuss design guidelines and to establish design criteria applicable to the site and use. The second step is actual review of the project with a decision made by the Historic Preservation Review Commission. Applicants are strongly encouraged to meet with members of the Public Works and Fire Departments during the pre-application process to identify pertinent issues. Benicia Main Street is a private organization whose mission is to facilitate business development and business on First Street. Applicants may wish to contact Benicia Main Street at (707) 745-9791 for design assistance.

The Planning Division can set up an appointment for pre-application review of your project with City staff. By meeting with staff early in the review process, many issues can be resolved which could otherwise cause later delays. The level of design review (Staff or Historic Preservation Review Commission review) and any additional permits that may be required (such as a variance or use permit) can be determined at this time. Information on pre-application review can be obtained from any of the staff planners.

APPLICATION: The submittal requirements for design review are listed on a separate document entitled "Design Review Application Checklist." Also refer to the "Submittal Standards" sheet for detailed content information. Please talk to a staff planner to discuss the application requirements for your specific project. Once submitted, the plans will be reviewed for completeness. You will be contacted if additional information is required. After staff has determined that the plans are complete, additional full sets of plans will be needed for review by the Historic Preservation Review Commission.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW: The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires that certain design review applications undergo environmental review. You will be informed if such review is required for your application. A separate "Environmental Review" handout contains additional submittal requirements.

SCHEDULING: Once an application is determined to be complete, it is formally accepted. Copies of the application are sent to review agencies and departments. The application is then scheduled for a public hearing before the Historic Preservation Review Commission. The Historic Preservation Review Commission meets once a month, usually on the last Thursday of the month at 6:30 p.m. The HPRC meeting is a public meeting, and notices are sent out to the owners of property located within 500 feet of your property at least 10 days prior to the meeting, and are also posted on or in the vicinity of your property.

ACTION: Prior to the scheduled hearing, the Historic Preservation Review Commission and the applicant will be provided with a staff report on the application. During the meeting, Planning Division staff will present the application and provide comments to the Commission. The applicant will then be given time to present the project to the Commissioners, and to answer any questions they may have. An architect or other designer working with the applicant may speak on the applicant's behalf, or present separate comments. Any member of the public attending the meeting may also offer comments.

At the conclusion of the comments, the Historic Preservation Review Commission will take action to approve, conditionally approve, deny, or continue the application for more information. The Commission bases its decision on: criteria contained in the Zoning Ordinance; Planning staff's recommendations; and testimony received at the meeting. A copy of the Commission's action is mailed to the applicant following the meeting.

The Historic Preservation Review Commission's decisions are final unless appealed to the Planning Commission within 10 business days of the date of action. Information on appeals can be found in a separate information sheet. An approved project may not commence construction until the close of the appeal period, and until all applicable permit approvals have been secured.

Requirements for related permits or licenses should be discussed with the following departments:

Building Permit	-	Building Division
Business License	-	Finance Department
Sign Permit	-	Planning Division
Use Permit	-	Planning Division

RELATED FORMS AND INFORMATION:

- Arsenal Historic Conservation Plan
- Downtown Historic Conservation Plan
- Staff-Level Design Review
- Design Review of Historic Single-Family Homes in the Arsenal Historic District
- Design Review of Non-Historic Single-Family Homes in the Arsenal Historic District
- Design Review of Historic Single-Family Homes in the Downtown Historic District
- Referral list for Historical Resources Consultants (by California Historical Resources Information System)

- Design Review Application Checklist
- Planning Application Form
- Project Summary Sheet
- Submittal Standards
- Mailing Notice Requirements
- Environmental Review
- Environmental Checklist
- Fee Schedule
- Stormwater Requirements