



Community Development Department Planning Division

STAFF-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 landforms and existing vegetation, protect views, and promote attractive, compatible architectural design.

WHEN REQUIRED: Nearly all projects that involve new construction, exterior alterations, 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 Community Development Director reviews the following projects:

- All projects involving less than 2,500 sq. ft. of floor area (other than single-family homes) in the CG, CC, CW, CO, RM, RH, PS, OS, and PD districts.
- All projects greater than 50,000 square feet of gross floor area in the IG, IL, IP and IW districts.
- All paint color changes in the H overlay district (except historic structures).

All non-historic single-family homes in the Arsenal Historic Conservation District (see information sheet on "Design Review of Non-Historic Single-Family Homes in the Arsenal Historic District").

If a project does not fall into one of the above categories, it will require design review by the Historic Preservation Review Commission. Information on that process may be found in a separate information sheet entitled "Commission-Level Design Review." Information on the design review process for historic single-family homes in the Downtown and Arsenal Historic Conservation 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 Community Development Director. Applicants are strongly encouraged to meet with members of the Public Works and Fire Departments during the pre-application process to identify pertinent issues.

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. If project revisions are required before approval, you may need to submit additional sets of plans.

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.

ACTION: Once an application is determined to be complete, it is formally accepted. Copies of the application are sent to review agencies and departments. Public hearings are normally not required for design review by the Community Development Director; however, the Community Development Director may schedule a hearing to receive public comments on a project. Plans are reviewed by a staff member, who recommends approval, conditional approval, or

disapproval of the plans. The Community Development Director approves, conditionally approves, or denies the application. A copy of the Director's action is mailed to the applicant following the decision.

The Community Development Director's decisions are final unless appealed to the Historic Preservation Review 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

RELATED FORMS AND INFORMATION:

- Commission-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

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