

URBAN DESIGN ELEMENT

Urban design is concerned with how the City looks and feels, with the sensory relationship between people and their environment, their feeling of time and place, and their sense of well-being.

In Hermosa Beach elements of urban design range from the backdrop of gentle hills and the foreground of the beach, to man-made structures, and small touches such as planting strips between sidewalks and curbs. Most of the major visual elements are fixed, and there is little opportunity to make decisions that affect the urban design character of a large segment of Hermosa Beach. Still, if these decisions are to be made wisely, Hermosa Beach must remain keenly aware of the City's urban design character and what, if anything, threatens this character.

OBJECTIVES

The General Plan's urban design policies and programs fall under three broad objectives.

- Preserve Hermosa Beach as a creative environment where people can live and work.
- Identify and maintain the smaller scale visual features that give character to Hermosa Beach and its neighborhoods.

Changes in the scale of the community that might occur through introduction of massive land uses such as large buildings or new transportation corridors should be carefully evaluated.

- Retain the uniqueness and diversity of Hermosa Beach's neighborhoods.

Results must be considered when design decisions are made. Will the decision strengthen the special character of the neighborhood or cause it to lose its separate identity?

SCALE AND FORM

Scale is relative and subjective and many of Hermosa Beach's most heated debates in the past have been on this question.

Policy 1: Maintain the present scale of the City, but modify those elements which by their massiveness are overwhelming and unacceptable.

Program 1: Discourage massive single uses through limitations on height and density to protect surrounding uses and community values.

In response to the expressed views of Hermosans, the Plan avoids bigness and advocates maintaining the present scale of the City. There is no reasons why the scale must always increase. The zoning will have to be revised in some areas to avoid scale changes.

At some locations abrupt changes of scale cause one land use to overwhelm another. This visual shock can be lessened by generous landscaping and limiting the apparent size of buildings and parking lots near the boundary.

Massive land uses also can become barriers that do more than define areas of the City. Undesirable barriers block physical access and can adversely affect nearby areas.

Program 2. Develop visual design standards for new development and a program for abating existing developments or design features that do not conform.

Program 3. Eliminate garish or degrading signs.

Program 4. Restore and maintain residential uses in older sections of Hermosa Beach.

The scale and character of many neighborhoods depends on the success of Program 4, as does the preservation of the City's older and therefore less costly housing for those who would otherwise be priced out of Hermosa Beach.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Policy 2: Encourage private preservation of buildings which have historic and/or architectural merit.

Hermosa Beach's cultural heritage has been preserved in many buildings dating from the turn of the century through the 30's and 40's. Many well-designed old homes should be preserved.

Program 5: Develop incentives for the retention and rehabilitation of houses with architectural or historic merit in all zones.

Often the cost and effort needed to maintain and upgrade an older structure places it at an economic disadvantage compared to new developments. Programs 6, 7 & 8 are incentives that can apply to some structures worthy of preservation. Additional incentives should be developed.

Program 6: Allow non-conforming use for buildings of architectural or historic merit for the life of the building.

In some situations, an historic building might be retained only if it can be used for an activity which would not normally be permitted under the zoning classification. In such instances, the City should consider procedures to allow non-conforming uses where they will not have a major detrimental effect on the neighborhood.

Program 7: Encourage and assist owners of buildings of architectural or historic merit in applying for tax relief under State programs *which began in 1977*
~~This involves a state program expected to begin in early 1977.~~

Program 8: Develop an alternative building code for historic houses.

Historic buildings should meet the safety standards of the Uniform Building Code, but the code often requires techniques that do not lend themselves to older buildings. The state's building code for historic houses, which would maintain the current safety standards but allow different building techniques, is expected to be issued in 1977.

Program 9: Encourage the rehabilitation of historic buildings by providing for the preservation of the building facade when it is not economically feasible to retain the whole building.

Preservation of building facades can be accomplished by private owners as well as by the City.

TRAFFICWAYS

It is primarily from the streets that any city is seen and its form perceived. With few exceptions, alignment, width, abutting development, or landscaping give each Hermosa Beach thoroughfare a separate character.

Policy 3: Promote visual continuity through tree planting, consistent use of low shrubs and ground cover, and removal of visually disruptive elements on major City streets.

Program 10: Accelerate the program of placing utility lines underground.

Program 11: Encourage the use of planting and other treatment of the space between street and sidewalk other than unrelieved concrete paving.

Program 12: Extend street tree planting Citywide, including median strip trees wherever possible, with specific schedules for completing individual streets.

Policy 4: Find new uses for street spaces other than for automobiles.

Program 13: Create mini-parks, pedestrian malls, promenades, open space, and areas where pedestrians would have right-of-way over automobiles.

Non-automobile use of street space should be given greater emphasis. Hermosa Beach, like all cities, is seen mainly from its streets, so the width, the landscape character, the height and location of the buildings relative to the street width, the pedestrian and bicycle uses, and the amount and speed of traffic are among the most important urban design elements the City can control. Auto dominance should not be assumed and in some locations bicycles or pedestrians should have right-of-way.

BUSINESS DISTRICTS

In addition to streets, business districts help to set Hermosa Beach's urban design character. Conflicts are evident between the demand for automobile space and the human desire for safe, pleasant, and short walking distances and visual enclosure. No amount of landscaping can fully overcome the proliferation of asphalt for street space, parking lots and drive-ins. People, not cars, dominate virtually all of the world's great cities. Long-term urban design improvements will be closely linked to the success of transit and to making walking necessary and attractive.

Policy 5: Encourage rehabilitation of aging retail areas to keep them economically healthy.

Program 14: Seek innovative ways to apply the spirit of current codes and ordinances to older buildings. Assist and encourage developers in finding ways to restore these buildings to usefulness.

Program 15: Encourage recycling of buildings that are vacant or derelict or both.

Keeping Hermosa Beach's business areas healthy and attractive while retaining the present scale of these areas should involve efforts to make it easier to redevelop older structures and discourage retention of derelict and vacant buildings *in that area.*

In addition to encouraging rehabilitation of individual structures, those portions of Hermosa Beach's business areas which contain buildings and uses that may deteriorate physically or economically should be watched. If the private sector is unable to rejuvenate those areas, the use of state and federal laws to assist private recycling should be studied.

Improving the quality of Hermosa Beach's business districts will depend on setting standards for new development appropriate to each district and enacting regulations that gradually will bring existing development into conformity.

Program 16: Design studies for retail districts should consider allowing buildings to encroach on sidewalk areas where the visual character of the street would be improved and pedestrian space would not be unduly constricted.

Program 17: New zoning regulations should clarify commercial business district boundaries and restrict the amount of frontage that may be occupied by uses that do not contribute to retail vitality. Pier Avenue, west of Hermosa Avenue, should be "malled" to enhance pedestrian usage and the design should encompass a wide range of activities to enhance pedestrian usage.

"Retail vitality" means the ability of business districts to maintain and expand their sales volume and profits. Older retail areas lose their vitality quickly when a number of sites become vacant or are occupied by vacant buildings, parking lots, stretches of blank walls, and drive-in businesses. All of these combine to discourage shoppers from walking to several stores before returning to their autos. The new zoning ordinance should encourage development that will keep Downtown and the Pacific Coast Highway business districts competitive and oriented to walkers.