



28 Aug, 2014

VIA EMAIL

Tricia Stevens
Planning Department
County of Sacramento
827 7th Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: WALKSacramento Review of New and Updated County Design Guidelines

WALKSacramento staff, in the interest of promoting more walkable, active, and healthy communities, have reviewed the County's new and updated Design Guidelines. We offer the following observations, comments, and suggestions:

While there a number of chapters throughout the document that would benefit from edits to and additions of individual guidelines, it is important to first discuss general topics and areas of concern that we believe need to be addressed throughout. The following points are more universal elements that WALKSacramento stresses in order to most effectively enhance the pedestrian environment in all or nearly all zoned areas.

1. Signage designed for way finding is a crucial element in creating more walkable spaces. Residents and patrons are more likely to walk and walk more often if way finding resources are more accessible.
2. Enhanced paving (stamped, colored, high visibility, etc.) highlights pedestrian movement and encourages active transportation choices. Particular areas where enhanced paving treatments are crucial to the pedestrian experience are in large mono-paved parking lots, at busier intersections and crossings, and along walkways.
3. Whenever a guideline specifies standards for lighting, regardless of the zoned area, we suggest to not only orient lighting at a pedestrian scale, but to follow the CPTED guidelines on safe lighting and landscaping.
4. Pedestrian and vehicular entrances to a site should always be separated to reduce potential conflicts.
5. Where barrier walls create long expanses of unbroken obstruction, pedestrian and bicycle cut-throughs should be provided. Further, wherever possible, create pedestrian paseos to adjoin uses. Line paseos with trees, landscaping, lighting, and other pedestrian amenities to encourage active transportation to and throughout sites. Pedestrian cut-throughs and paths between compatible uses are essential to creating active communities and reducing the dependency on vehicles.
6. The County should discourage large mono-paved lots in all zoned areas. Enhanced paving, landscaping, tree coverage, and pedestrian walkways, and pedestrian oriented

lighting not only make parking lots more aesthetically pleasing, but create safer environments for drivers and walkers.

7. Internal streets and medians should be designed to provide maximum tree shade to encourage walking and bicycling.
8. Bicycle parking needs to be addressed wherever applicable. Simply stating that bicycle parking should be part of the site design is not enough. At a minimum, the class, distance from entry, and number of bicycle parking spaces should be included in the guideline document. Place bike parking within visible distance from building windows and entrances.
9. All guidelines that refer to active design must use “shall” rather than “should” in order to truly facilitate the development of more walkable, pedestrian and bicycle oriented communities and neighborhoods. Further, eliminate the term “when possible” and any other conciliatory phrases from these guidelines to strengthen active design commitment.
10. Transit facilities should be well designed to keep pedestrians off of a main road. Create separated sidewalks and large paved waiting pads to separate transit users from traffic. Covered transit stops protect pedestrians from the elements and potential traffic collisions. Include scheduling signage as a means to wayfinding.
11. Where a guideline refers to citing uses “within walking distance” or “within reasonable distance for pedestrians” quantitatively define the distance to within ½ of a mile or less.

The two newest chapters provide strong guidelines for the development of walkable, active, and healthy communities. Many of the guidelines in these sections should apply not only to the chapter within which they are found, but to other land use designations. Further, robust active design guidelines can also be found in existing chapters. In order to strengthen the County’s overall commitment to active design, it is recommended that these guidelines be applied to all relevant chapters. Overall consistency with regard to active design principles will create a Design Guideline that supports walkability and healthy communities throughout. In this letter we have not only highlighted a number of these guidelines, but have suggested where else they should be included.

Single Family Design Guidelines:

It is clear that the new Single Family Design Guidelines were created with a strong intent to establish active communities. WALKSacramento commends the County on developing guidelines that call for calmer, more navigable streets, accessible open space, visually attractive neighborhoods, and other features that would lead to more walkable neighborhoods.

A particularly strong active design guideline found in the new Single Family guidelines reads, “Street layout shall reflect a street hierarchy consistent with the subdivisions location and internal needs. Streets should be “complete streets” designed for pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular use consistent with the standards for the street’s hierarchical designation. Separated sidewalks for residential streets are especially important where the residential street is a connection to schools, parks, or over civic amenities. Separated sidewalks provide a safer and healthier environment for pedestrians.” Complete streets elements, especially separated

sidewalks, should apply to all streets regardless of land use designation. No other guideline in existing chapters provides such specificity in terms of pedestrian and cyclist oriented streetscape design. This guideline should be applied to all chapters within the document.

Another effective guideline found in the new Single Family guidelines reads, “The circulation system should be logical and predictable. Streets should connect to adjacent neighborhoods and provide direct access to schools, parks, and community centers for pedestrians, bicyclists, automobiles, and emergency vehicles.” This is an excellent and comprehensive guideline that calls for connectivity and accessibility for all users of the road. Apply this guideline to the Multifamily and Mixed Use guidelines to further the County’s goal in supporting actively design communities.

New Communities Design Guidelines:

Again, in our review of the County’s New Communities Design Guidelines, the emphasis on creating active and healthy communities was clear.

In the Village Center/Mixed Use section, it is stated, “To enhance walkability and connectivity, the predominant street pattern for village centers should be a grid or modified grid pattern with maximum block lengths of 300 to 500 feet. Blocks of greater than 500 feet should have mid-block crosswalks and pass-throughs.” While some other chapters include guidelines on maximum block length, this is the most specific to where crossings are required, block design, and length of blocks. Replicate this guideline within all other chapters. It should be noted that crosswalks alone are not sufficient. Include in this guideline the necessity for traffic calming along longer blocks, pedestrian oriented lighting, enhanced paving or high visibility paint, and signage that directs drivers to reduce speeds.

The guideline also specifies that, “As much as possible, a major roadway such as a thoroughfare or arterial should not separate residential areas from commercial uses.” This guideline should be incorporated into the Commercial, Multifamily, and in some capacity the Single Family chapters in order to ensure that residents are not required to cross large roadways to access commercial uses. Further, where residential uses abut commercial properties, provide cut throughs and actively designed paseos to encourage active participation between land uses.

In the Parks, Open Space and Drainage/Flood Facilities section, the Guideline specifies that, “Public safety is a high priority and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles should be applied to the design of off-street trails.” CPTED principles are instrumental in addressing pedestrian safety and can be applied to any land use where foot traffic is expected, yet this is the only guideline that mentions them throughout the document. Incorporate or require the use of CPTED guidelines in all chapters of the Design Guidelines. Include more examples of CPTED strategies and best practices within the CPTED appendix.

Commercial Design Guidelines

While there are a handful of smaller edits to individual guidelines necessary to further encourage walkability in the Commercial chapter, it is also worth highlighting more robust and universally

applicable active design guidelines. Both of the standout guidelines are found in the Parking Lots and Driveways section.

The first guideline reads, “Parking for commercial uses should be located next to or behind buildings. These parking areas should be divided up into smaller, landscaped lots with defined pedestrian connections.” No other guideline or set of guidelines in the document are as extensive in calling for smaller parking lots with pedestrian walkways and landscaping. This guideline has a strong potential for not only designing better pedestrian oriented commercial sites, but any areas where parking lots may be required. Adapt this guideline for use in the Mixed Use and Multifamily chapters where larger parking lots would be a detriment to safety and walkability.

The second guideline reads, “Projects should have a hierarchy of primary and secondary drives and roads. Primary driveways should be designed as streets. This includes designing raised pedestrian sidewalks, streetscape and lighting to improve wayfinding, reinforcing site design and pedestrian connection concepts.” Again, a comprehensive guideline that encourages and provides examples of pedestrian streetscape treatments should be prevalent throughout the document wherever streets are concerned. Include this guideline in all chapters of the document.

Multifamily Design Guidelines

The Multifamily Design Guidelines have the potential for significant improvement with regard to pedestrian oriented planning. In the document we have commented on number of elements including the provision of accessible open space, parking lot design, site entrances and exits, traffic calming, landscaping as means of enhancing the pedestrian environment, pedestrian circulation, lighting, public streets, bike parking, and building orientation.

In the Circulation section, the Guideline states, “Provide reasonable access for persons with disabilities.” This guideline is vague and provides little direction or guidance on how to accommodate for persons with disabilities. In the Building Setbacks and Alignments section of the Commercial Design Guidelines it is written, “All landscaping and paving shall consider the needs and safety of the disabled.” Combine the two guidelines and apply it to all chapters of the document in order to provide consistent specificity with regard to infrastructure for persons with disabilities. Include specifications on types of paving, required distances from transit stops and streets to building frontages, and streetscape design features such as flashing beacons and audible countdowns at crosswalks that enhance the transportation system for the disabled.

Although we have only specifically recommended editing and duplicating these few guidelines, there are a number of other active design guidelines (particularly found in the new chapters) that are worth incorporating into other chapters of the document. Additional comments are attached as notes on the draft guideline pdf.

Sincerely,

Kirin Kumar
Project Assistant | WALKSacramento
(916) 446 – 9255