

# CITY OF SOUTH SAN FRANCISCO

## Design Review Guide



## **INTRODUCTION**

South San Francisco encompasses nearly 4,300 acres and contains a mixture of residential, commercial and industrial uses. Like many communities, single family residences are the most predominant land use, occupying 33 percent of the land in the city. The city contains several distinct residential neighborhoods that vary in age, neighborhood character and housing design, including:

Avalon  
Country Club  
Grand  
Mayfair  
Orange Park  
Paradise Valley  
Parkway

Sunshine Gardens  
Stonegate  
Southwood  
Terrabay  
Westborough Greendale  
Winston Manor  
Winston Serra

Over the years, many of South San Francisco's residents have chosen to add new rooms and increase the square footage to their existing homes. In earlier cases, additions were made without any regard to the design of the existing home or its compatibility with the neighborhood. In order to address this problem, the City's Planning Division began to review additions and one-, two-, and three-family residential projects.

The following guidelines are meant to assist you, the homeowner and/or the designer, in designing a new single family residence or an addition to an existing residence that improves both the project and the appearance of the neighborhood. We have put together several "rules of thumb" and accompanying illustrations to help you understand what type of designs the City's Design Review Board is expecting to see in new residences and additions.

Since every property and project is unique, we can not possibly list a solution to every design problem and we do not want to restrain future creative or innovative solutions.

# **INTENT AND PURPOSE OF THE DESIGN REVIEW GUIDELINES**

**To seek continuity of design and a sense of compatibility.**

Each structure should reasonable relate not only to its own site, but to adjacent areas as well. Each part of a design should relate within the composition as a whole. The materials, details, forms, etc., of an addition should relate to or mimic the original structure. New residences should relate to the adjacent structures in a similar manner.

**To encourage high quality design that contributes to the neighborhood and preserves property values.**

New residences and additions should be constructed of high quality materials and with attention to design and detail that will keep the structure from rapidly deteriorating. Maintaining and increasing the property values in a neighborhood can be protected by promoting quality construction and design.

**To strongly promote creativity and originality of design**

While these guidelines may seem prescriptive, they are not meant to discourage creativity and/or originality. These are general rules which are to be used and adapted according to each situation.

# WHAT KIND OF PROJECTS ARE COVERED BY THE GUIDELINES

What types of structures are covered by these guidelines?

- All new single family, two family and three family homes on individual lots which are not in planned developments.
- All new residential additions that break the existing roof line or constitutes a 50 percent or greater increase in the floor area.

How are these structures affected by these guidelines?

## *Building Height:*

Many neighborhoods are built with similar types and styles of residences. In deference to these existing structures, new residences or additions are expected to respect the height of the neighboring homes, with particular attention paid to the adjacent structures.

## *Building Bulk:*

Bulk is a relative term that relates to the study of the relationship of the volumes of a project. It is desirable to keep the mass of a building in relation to the surrounding buildings in order to obtain a measure of compatibility. This bulk criteria includes height and breadth, but is particularly focused on three dimensional volume.

## *Lot Coverage:*

While the zoning code allows a project to cover a certain maximum percentage of a parcel, it is not a recommended practice to fill the lot to the setback and coverage limits. Arrangement of massing can assist in using less of the lot than the maximum permits.

## *Neighborhood Compatibility:*

Compatibility is partially in the eye of the beholder, but it contains elements of the above three criteria as well as materials, detailing and forms. This area is the primary rationale for reviewing designs.

# **RULES OF THUMB: COMMON PROBLEMS AND SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS**

## **Talk to a Planner Before Submitting Plans for Formal Review**

To save you time and expense in designing and redesigning your proposed new building or addition, we suggest that you first contact the Planning Division staff by asking key questions before submitting your final proposal. Initially, you should call a planner to ask what is allowed under the current City zoning for setbacks, densities and heights. Following, prepare a rough sketch of your plan and meet with a planner to review your design. Once you have a good idea of what is acceptable to the City, then submit your completed site plan and elevation drawings to the City for formal review.

## **Design vs Construction Drawings**

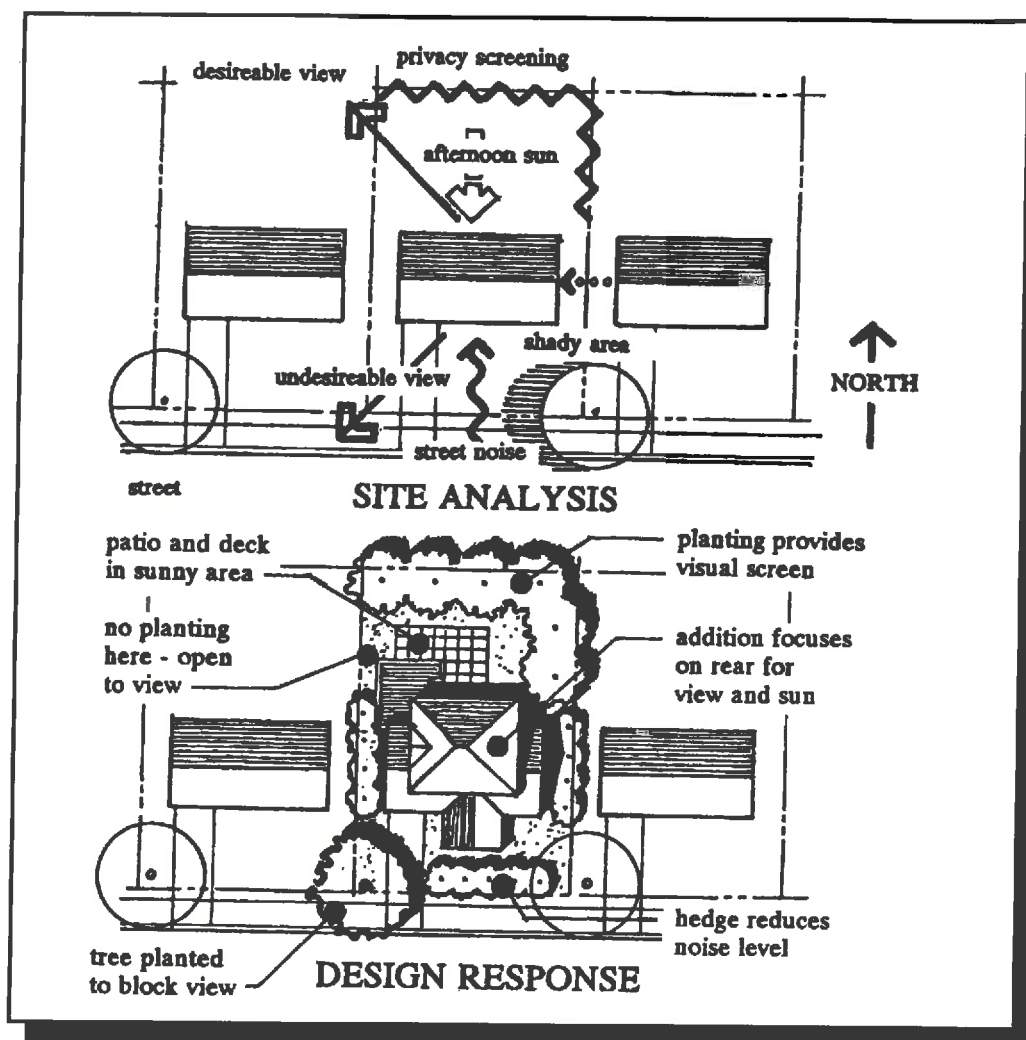
You do not need to submit final construction drawings for review by planning staff or the Design Review Board. The Board is generally concerned with zoning and design-related issues pertaining to your project. Your preliminary drawings can answer the Boards basic questions, such as the location of the residence on the lot, external massing, and detailing.

## **Think About How to Explain Your Project to the Design Review Board**

Sometimes, typical two dimensional site plans and elevation drawings do not adequately show the true scale or design of a proposed new building or addition. If you feel that the drawings, although accurate, need graphic representations of what you are trying to do with your proposal, we recommend that you provide graphic examples of the project. Although not currently required, graphic presentations could include a rough scale model, color slides for an overhead presentation, or a digital copies of your project for a computer presentation.

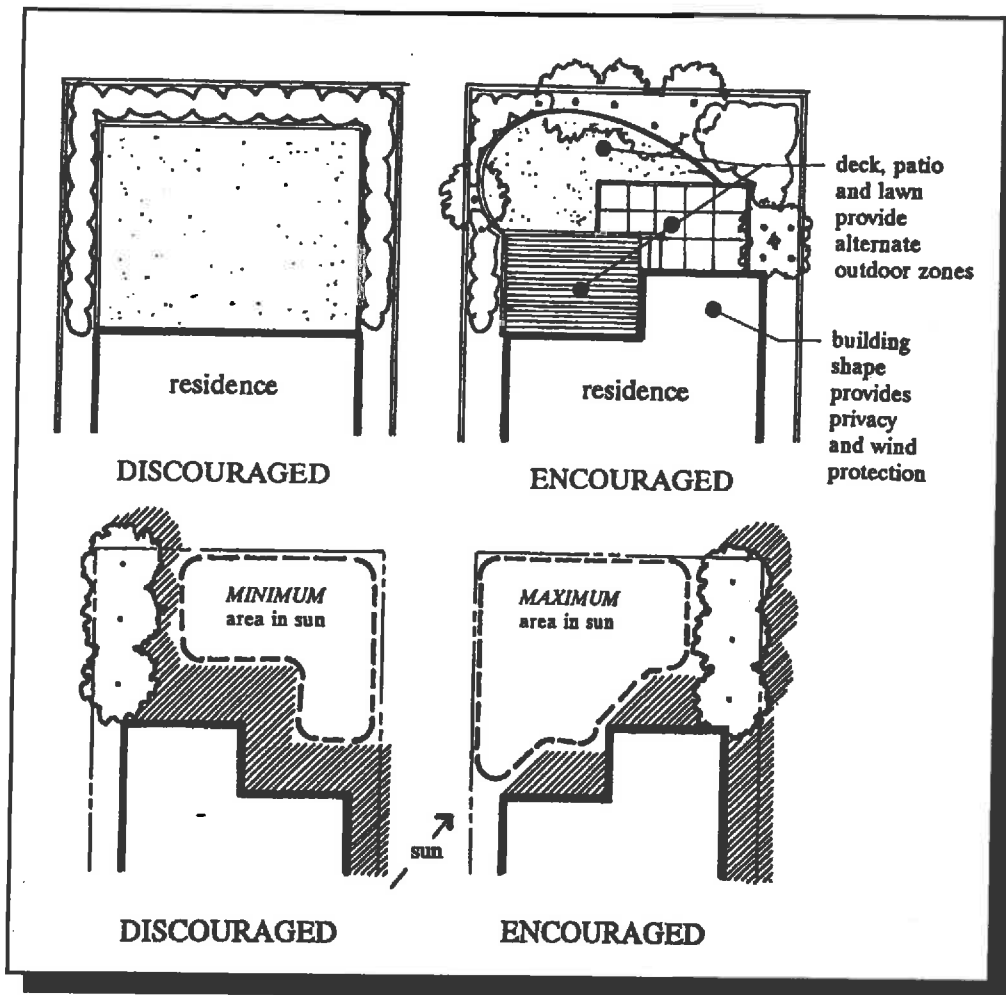
## SITE ANALYSIS AS FORM GIVER

The design of any building project begins with two objectives — the first is to satisfy the owner's program, while the other is to respond to site restraints without severely giving up any important piece of either. It is at this stage of development that building forms and room orientation should address the design of outdoor areas and conversely the design analysis level include: privacy, noise screening, daylight and direct solar access, outdoor play area, location of entry/exit, etc.



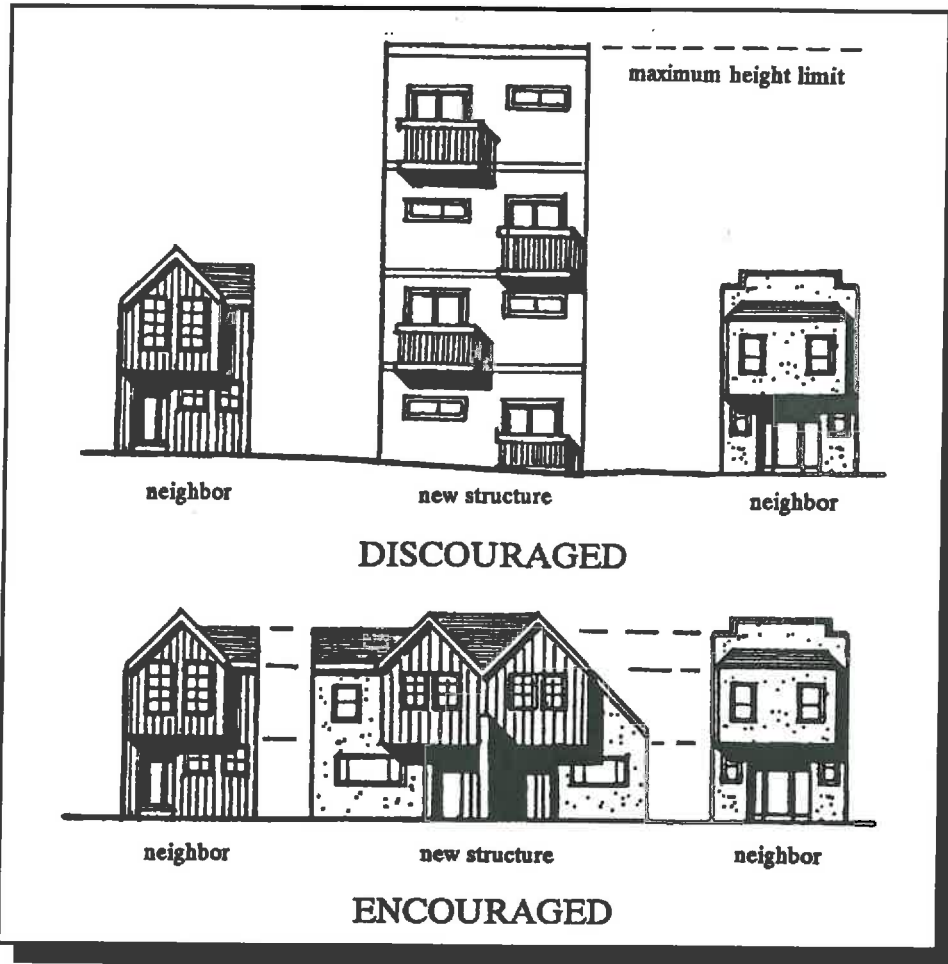
## DESIGNED OUTDOOR SPACE

Too often additions are added to the rear of an existing residence without regard for the design of the remaining outdoor space. Interior space and exterior space should be designed at the same time and be complementary of each other. Instead of a flat wall at the rear, indentations or extensions may help shape interesting and private outdoor space. Planting should not be left out of the design for an addition. Although plants can be added later, it is helpful to include a preliminary planting design in order to have a guide for the complete rear outdoor space.



# INCOMPATIBLE BUILDING HEIGHT

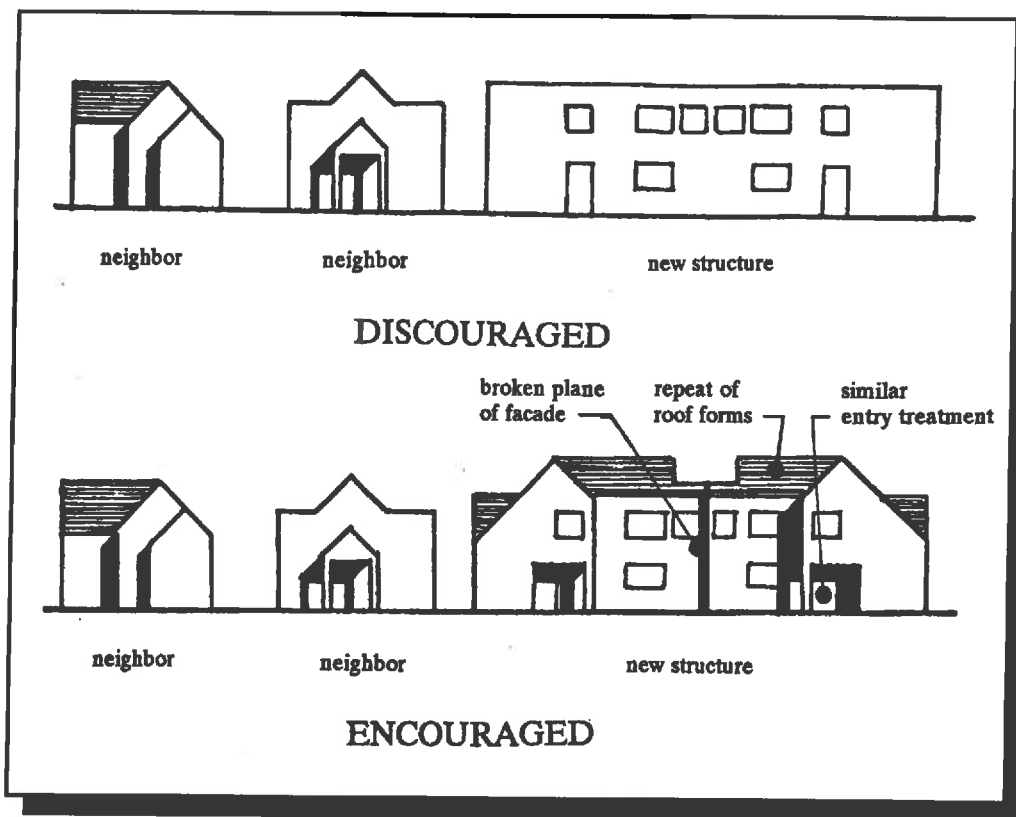
New structures and second floor additions are encouraged to respect the height of the adjacent buildings. The maximum height limit is not intended to be the most desirable height without regard for surrounding structures. Neighborhood compatibility is quickly destroyed by new structures which tower over all adjacent buildings. A balance must be sought which will examine height of building versus lot coverage and building bulk. The three factors should be looked at in combination with each other to produce a result which is satisfying to both the owner and the neighborhood.





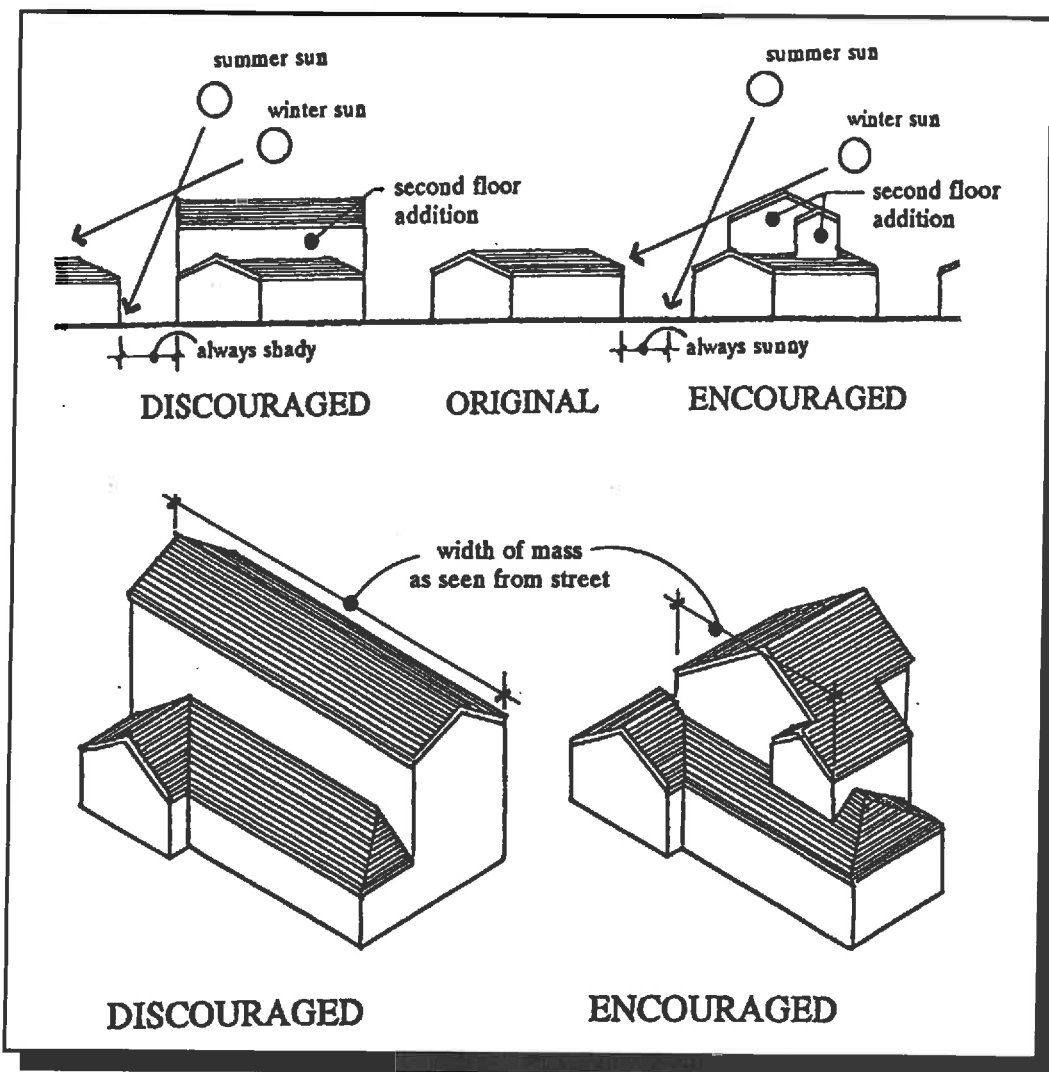
## NEIGHBORING FORMS AND MATERIALS

Infill projects are encouraged to respect and/or reflect the forms and materials of the neighboring structures. Placing a building with a flat roof in a neighborhood of pitched roofs is an obvious example of neglecting compatibility of form. Likewise, a new structure with stucco in a neighborhood of wood sided buildings would also be an obvious example of neglecting compatibility of materials. The primary recommendation regarding form and/or materials choices would be to repeat what is in the neighborhood unless there is a compelling reason to prevent this approach.



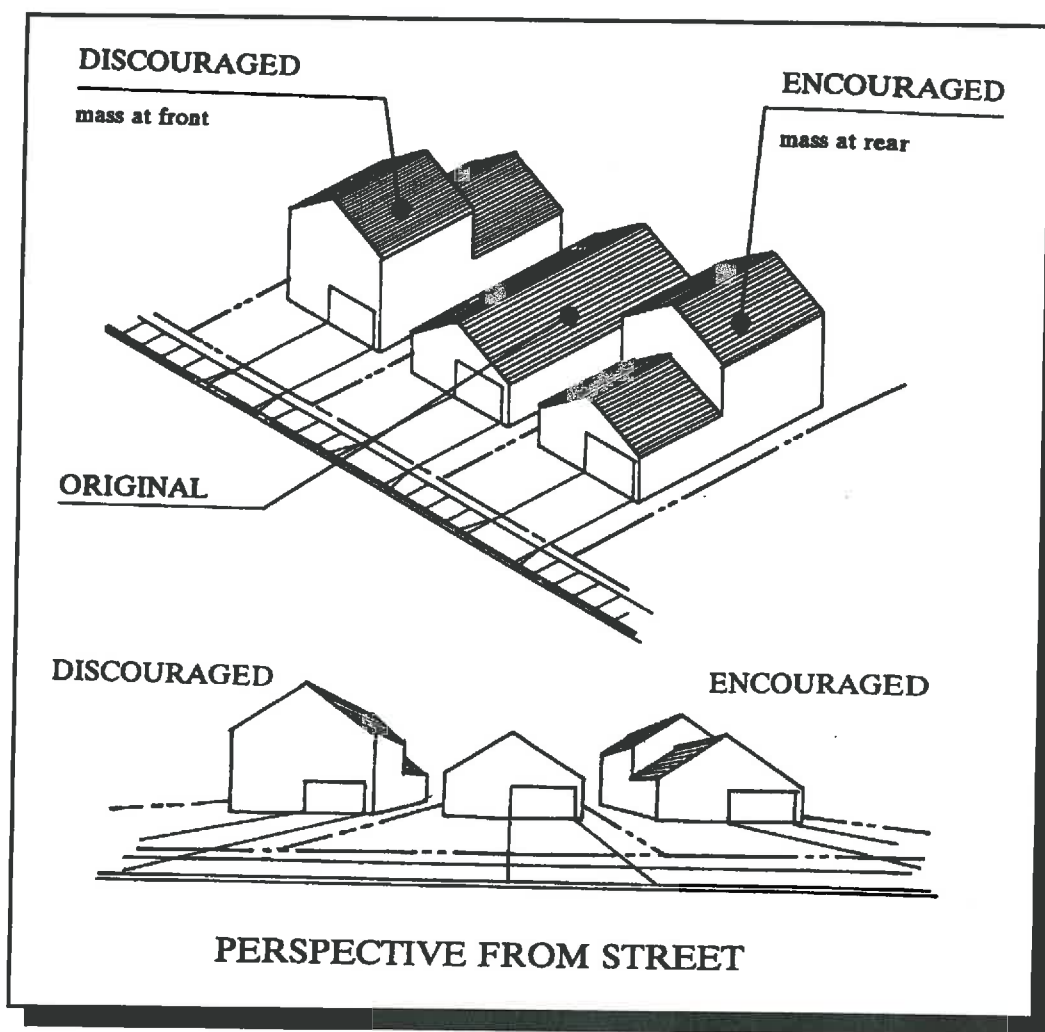
## SECOND FLOOR SETBACK

Daylight and solar access are not protected rights for existing homeowners. However, the City does encourage new residences and additions to older residences to respect their neighbor's access to indirect daylight and direct sunlight. In order to do this, the second floor should step back from the lower floor wall plane to allow some light and sun to penetrate into the adjoining yard and residence. Respecting the daylight "plane" by reducing the width of second floors also reduces the apparent bulk of the entire residence.



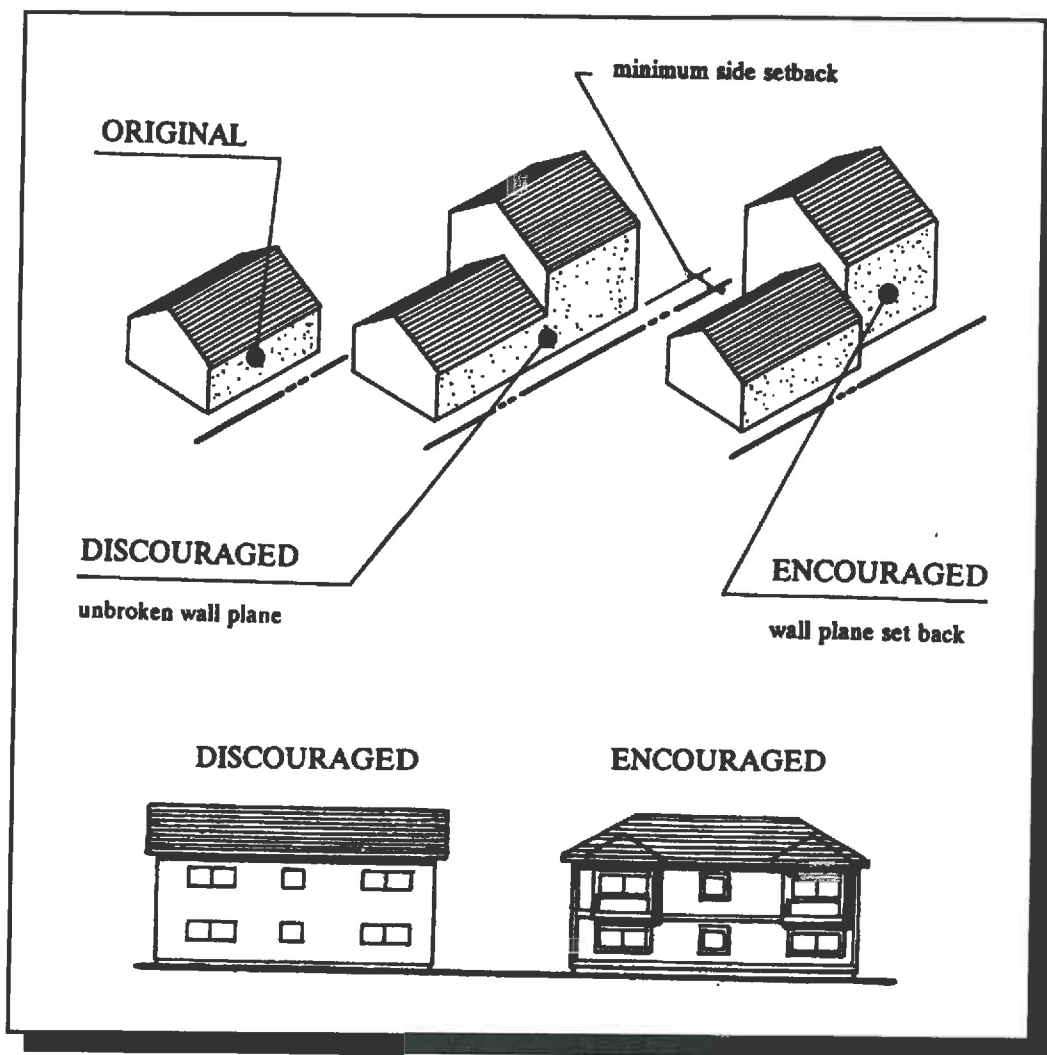
## HIGHER MASSING AT REAR

Many homeowners are building second floor additions on top of one story residences, changing the character of the original neighborhood. These second story additions are often described by neighbors as too bulky or too massive in relationship to the existing residences. Often the massive look of a second story addition can be relieved by locating the addition toward the rear of the building, thus reducing the impact of a second story facade facing the street.



## BROKEN PLANES OF FACADES

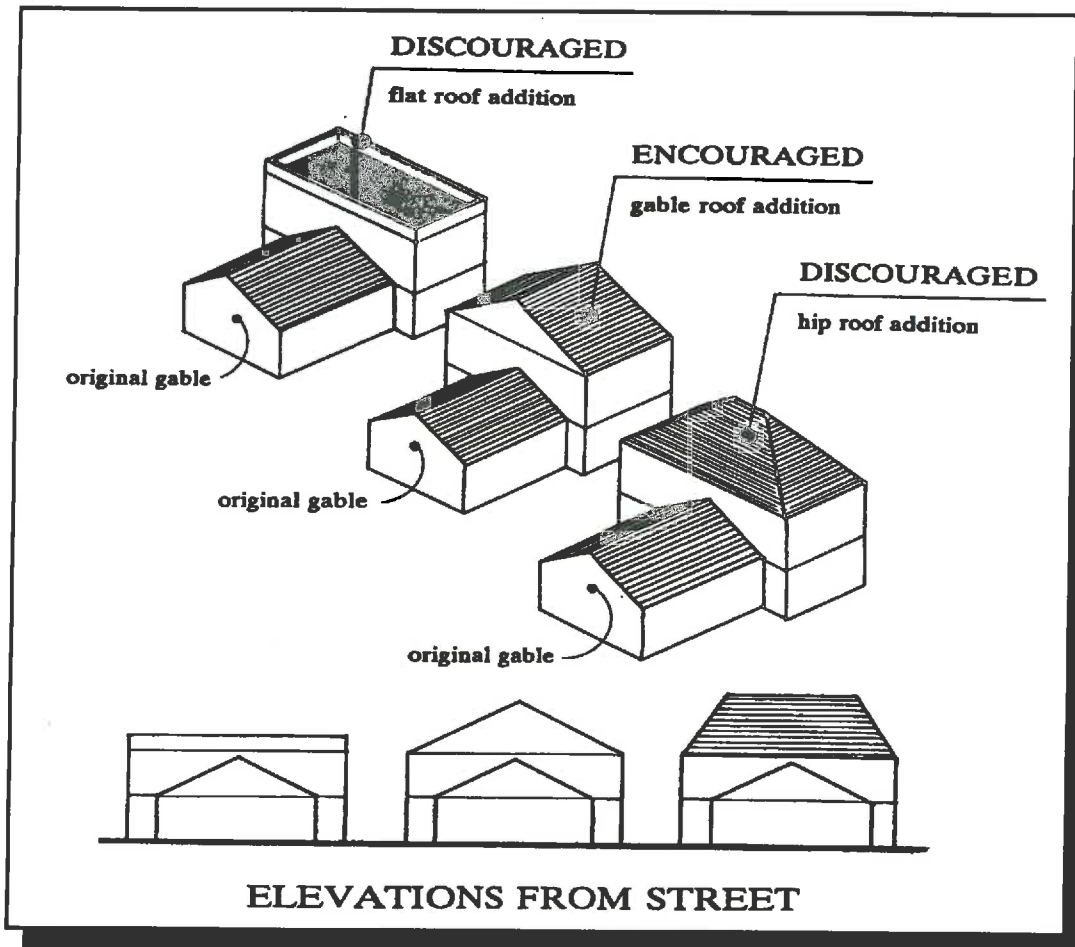
Long, unbroken planes on the sides of buildings lack interest and relief. If possible, avoid lining up walls without any detail for great lengths. If the side of the existing residence is built to the minimum setback line, attempt to pull the addition away from that line. Use architectural features, such as bays and exterior fireplace mass, to create interesting patterns, rhythms, and shadows over the long side of the building's facade.





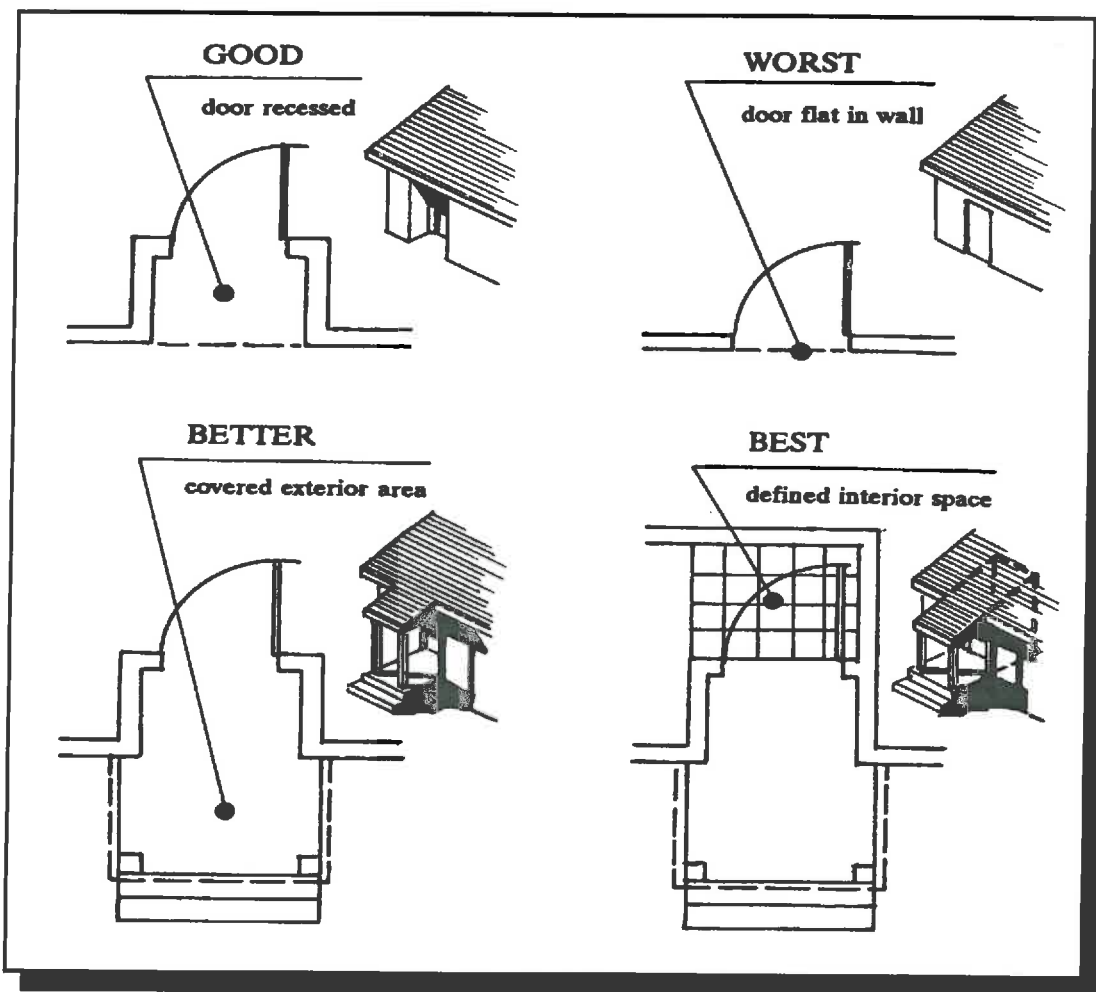
## COMPATIBLE ROOF FORMS

Mixing the roof forms of an existing building and an addition is not recommended. As a general rule, the addition should be integrated into the original building design. Building a flat or a hip roof on the addition, while existing residence is designed with a gable end roof, will give the entire building a rough, cheap and unfinished look.



## CLEARLY DEFINED ENTRY

Entries are more than a means of access since they should provide an exterior space for arrivals and an interior room for greeting guests. The view of the entry from the street is important for people to visually locate the entrance of the building. Recessing the door and/or adding a roof extension provides this visual cue by using shadow lines, provides weather protection, and breaks the plane of the street facade.

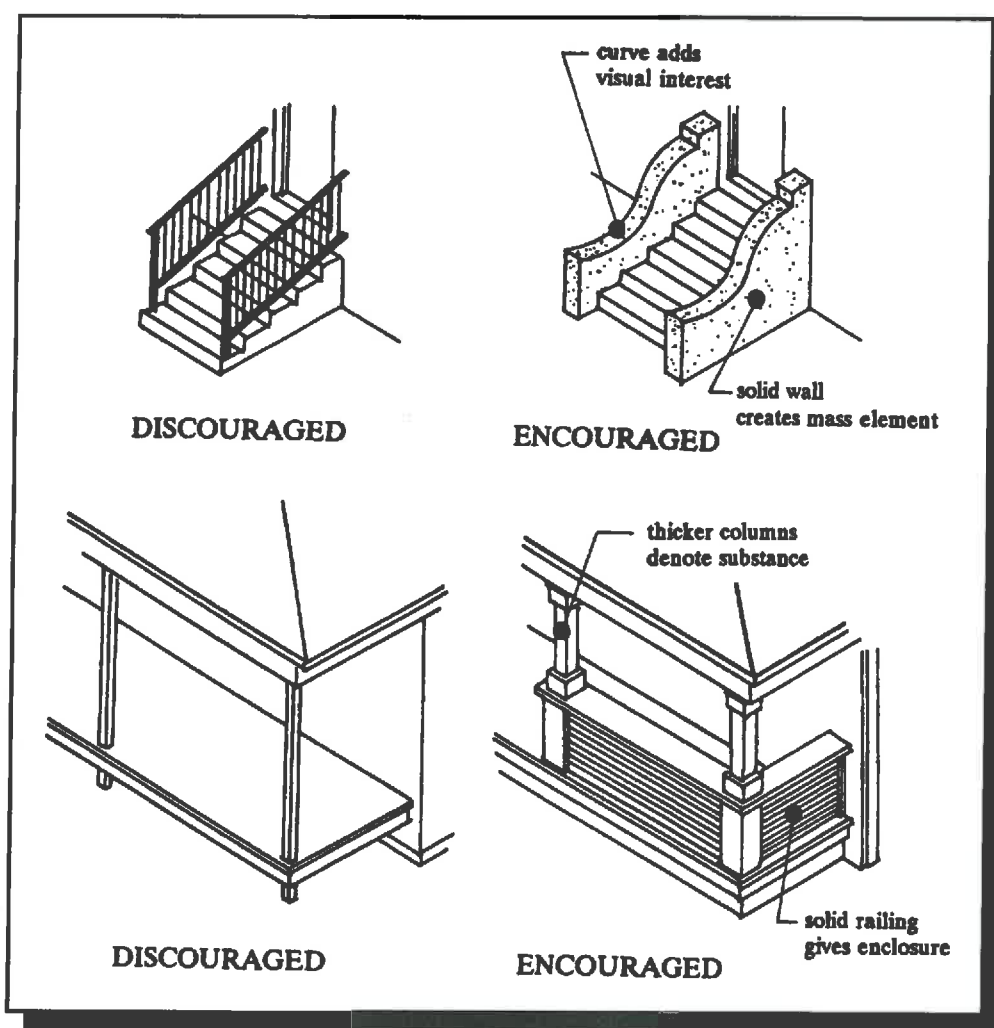






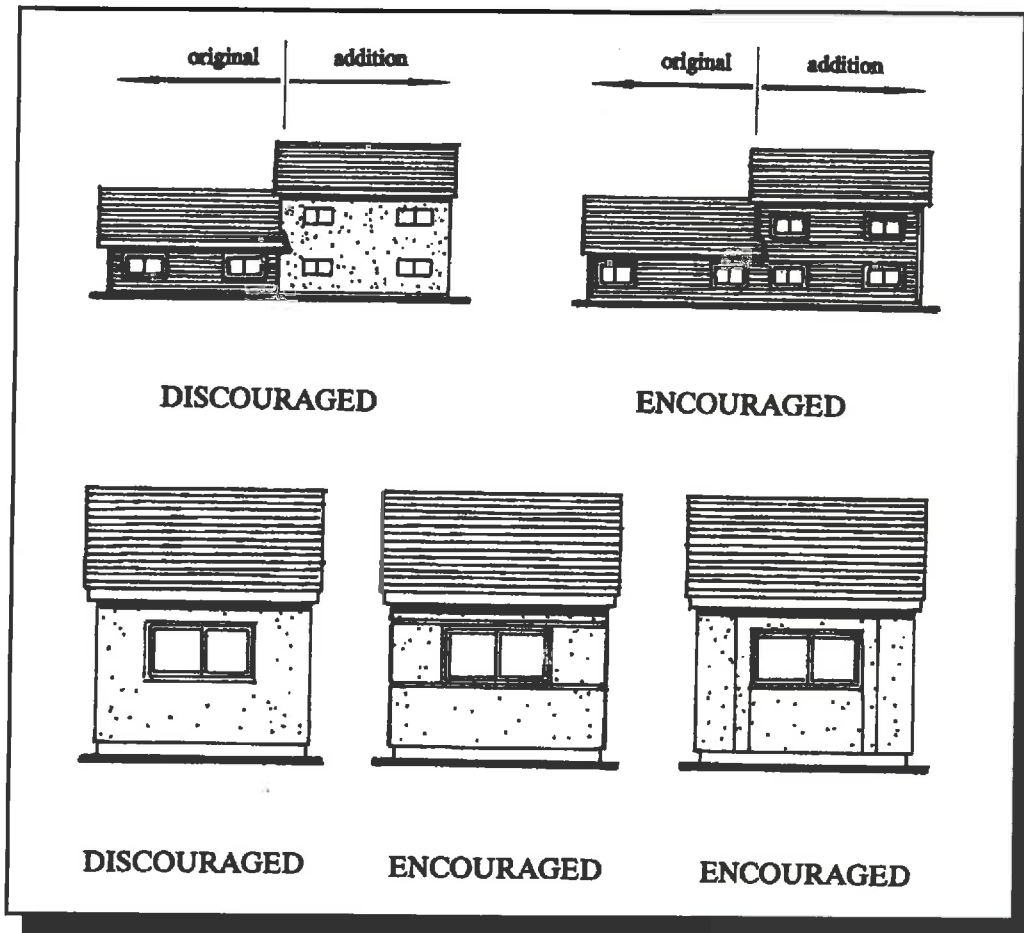
## GOOD NEIGHBOR DETAILS

Many areas of the city contain older homes with interesting architectural designs and details. Often the details found on a residence is what gives it character and style. It may no longer be possible to simply copy these designs and forms since the craftsmanship need to do so is expensive or unavailable. However, it is possible to add variations on these designs to new residences and additions in order to enliven the overall form and add detailed points of interest to the building.



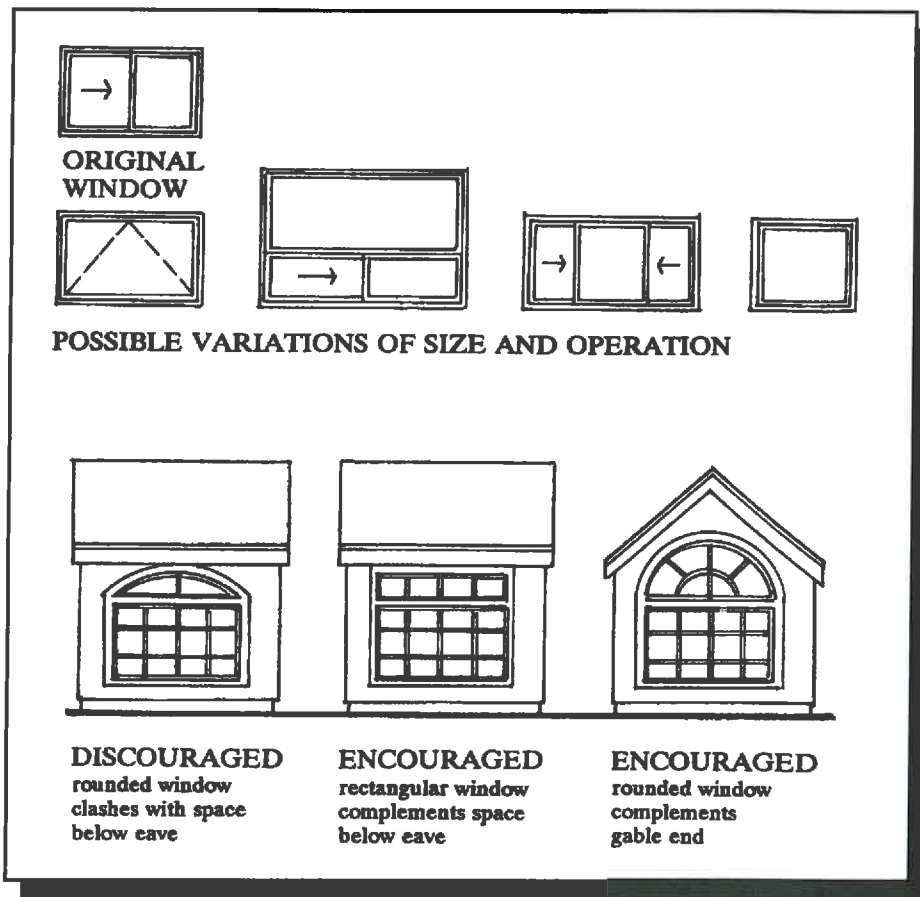
## MATCHING TRIM DETAILS

Trim adds character and a human scale to a building. If there is a pattern of trim on an existing residence, this pattern should be matched or continued on the addition. If, for example, there is no trim on a stucco residence, it is recommended that trim be added to the windows and the second floor line. Stucco often cracks at the window corners and trim will help hide this problem. A material like stucco contracts and cracks will occur over large areas of the building. It is, therefore, helpful to add expansion joints and use vertical and/or horizontal lines in the design of the facade.



## A FAMILY OF WINDOWS

Mixing window types and forms can create a chaotic pattern on the facade of the building. Windows can vary, yet they should have some resemblance to each other. A way to think of this concept is to characterize windows as families; with each member having a personal identity but resembling the other windows. The placement of each window is also important to the overall design of the building. Windows should be located with both its internal function and its external composition and relationship with other building elements in mind.



Beyond these major concerns, the following list of "rules" of thumb" summarize comments frequently made by the Design Review Board.

- Give overall dimensions on plans, list heights and the roof pitches on plan elevations.
- Avoid trying to maximize the area of a second floor addition.
- Redesign existing single story roofs when adding a second floor in order to prevent future roof drainage problems.
- When aligning the existing building and the addition, make their elements line up exactly. Otherwise, let the difference between the two elements be noticeable since small alignments are considered to be visually annoying.
- Corner rooms should have windows on two sides for better lighting and cross ventilation.
- Use the same siding materials on all sides of the building (existing and the addition).
- Avoid installing wet bars in family rooms and full baths for bedrooms in areas that are not part of the main building. The Board and the Planning Commission do not wish to encourage any opportunity to create an unimproved second unit.
- Generally, unless designed for accent, align both the upper and lower floor windows.
- Symmetry should be used to create a orderly appearance to the building.
- Use of natural materials, rather than vinyl, for siding is preferred.