
SPIKOWSKI PLANNING ASSOCIATES

1617 Hendry Street, Suite 416
Fort Myers, Florida 33901-2947

telephone: (239) 334-8866
fax: (239) 334-8878

e-mail: bill@spikowski.com
web site: www.spikowski.com

MEMORANDUM

TO: Fort Myers Beach Local Planning Agency
FROM: Bill Spikowski
DATE: October 10, 2003
SUBJECT: RESIDENTIAL DESIGN STANDARDS – LPA meeting, noon on October 21, 2003

STATUS OF RESIDENTIAL DESIGN STANDARDS

When adopting the zoning chapter (chapter 34) into the Land Development Code in March, the Town Council did not include the proposed residential design standards that were in the LPA draft.

On June 17, the LPA discussed this subject in the first step toward identifying a new consensus. The LPA reviewed the attached memo dated June 10 that summarized the original proposal and several alternative approaches. A draft of the minutes of the June 17 meeting are also attached.

On October 21, the LPA is scheduled to discuss this subject again. As additional background material, please review the following documents:

- *Building Plans and Urban Design Principles for Towns, Cities and Villages in South Florida* by the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Council and the Florida Department of Community Affairs.

This book begins with an illustrated essay that explains and illustrates the distinction between traditional towns and the modern suburbs. Immediately following are examples of pre-drawn house plans for traditional neighborhoods (whether new or old), with their narrower lots. Note the absence of garage-dominant house designs.

Fort Myers Beach presents special challenges not addressed in this book: without alleys, most driveways must enter through the front yard; and because of its floodplain location, new houses must be elevated. For these reasons the specific house plans in this book are not appropriate for Fort Myers Beach. However, the planning principles set forth here are sound and should provide the town with additional guidance concerning the goals for its residential design standards.

- “Design Review” chapter (partial) from *Discretionary Land Use Controls: Avoiding Invitations to Abuse of Discretion* by land use lawyer Brian Blaesser. This book is aimed at planners and land use lawyers who struggle with the inherent legal and practical difficulties with site-specific development approvals. Pay particular attention to the distinction that Blaesser makes beginning on page 304 between three types of design review:
 - *Urban design review*,
 - *Appearance review*, and
 - *Architectural review*.

You will note that the residential design standards that had been proposed in Chapter 34 were primarily the first type (urban design review). Those standards did not attempt to judge the appearance of houses on any subjective grounds or to mandate any particular architectural style. Rather they were objective standards that addressed mainly the fronts of houses, because the fronts form the edges of the “public realm” surrounding the street.

Urban design standards of this type are more legally defensible than appearance or architectural standards. The standards previously proposed were predictable by their very nature and were to be administered without public hearings where the individual aesthetic tastes of a group of review board members inevitably come into play (and sometimes come into conflict).

From the community perspective, these types of urban design standards are probably more acceptable at Fort Myers Beach because they don’t conflict with the eclectic nature of existing neighborhoods. In fact, they encourage and sometimes require more flexibility in house design than large production homebuilders are comfortable with, ensuring that a wider variety of talents will be involved in creating the next generation of houses at Fort Myers Beach.

The latter portions of this chapter contain detailed legal guidance and drafting suggestions which I can provide to LPA members upon request. However, the basic distinction discussed above is crucial at this point: should the town limit its residential design standards to focusing on how houses enclose or “frame” public streets, or the should these standards go further and attempt to govern the general appearance or the detailed architectural character of new houses?

- “Making a Neighborhood Friendly to Pedestrians,” from the recent book *Redesigning Cities: Principles, Practice, Implementation* by Jonathan Barnett. Barnett presents five suggestions for designing new pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods. Some of these principles cannot be applied to existing neighborhoods, but they provide a very clear summary of good town planning practices.

- “How Dimensional Standards Shape Residential Streets” by Joel Russell, a planner and land use lawyer. In this article from the Planning Commissioners Journal, Russell explains how our communities are shaped by very simple zoning standards such as setbacks, height, lot area, and lot coverage.

Much of the Town of Fort Myers Beach was built up prior to Lee County’s adoption of suburban zoning standards. By retaining Lee County’s suburban zoning standards in the town’s land development code, the town deprives itself of an important ability to shape new buildings as older homes are replaced, even if the town sets as its goal the re-creation of existing house styles or the adaptation of those eclectic styles to today’s floodplain regulations and higher car ownership rates.

- “Design Rules: Making Room for Different Tastes,” a recent magazine article by Virginia Postrel. This article illustrates two wholly divergent trends that can be caused by design review: uniformity versus variety.

Modern suburban communities often desire uniformity in house designs. This uniformity is most strongly dictated by deed restrictions or by developers seeking economies of scale by constructing nearly identical homes. However, strict design review by local governments can have some of the same effects toward uniformity.

Fort Myers Beach was largely developed in an era when uniformity was valued far less than variety. The result (although sometimes disappointing!) is a community with a very strong local character. Standards for design review at Fort Myers Beach need to be clear about whether they are attempting to accept and encourage this variety and diversity, or whether they seek to change direction and move the town toward greater uniformity. Design review can be written to move a community in either direction.

NEXT STEP

On June 17, most LPA members who were present indicated their interest in reexamining residential design standards. The purpose of the October 21 meeting is to continue this discussion and decide which general direction this effort should take: either an attempt to improve on the approach to residential design standards in the previous draft, or to explore a different type of design standards.

Attachments: Previous memo to LPA on residential design standards, dated June 10, 2003
Draft minutes of LPA meeting on June 17, 2003
Building Plans and Urban Design Principles for Towns, Cities and Villages in South Florida by TCRPC and Florida DCA
“Design Review” by Brian Blaesser.
“Making a Neighborhood Friendly to Pedestrians” by Jonathan Barnett
“How Dimensional Standards Shape Residential Streets” by Joel Russell
“Design Rules: Making Room for Different Tastes” by Virginia Postrel

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Fort Myers Beach Local Planning Agency
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DATE: June 10, 2003
SUBJECT: RESIDENTIAL DESIGN STANDARDS – For LPA meeting at noon on June 17, 2003

STATUS OF RESIDENTIAL DESIGN STANDARDS

When adopting the zoning chapter (chapter 34) into the Land Development Code in March, the Town Council did not include the proposed residential design standards that were in the LPA draft. These standards were the subject of considerable discussion at both public hearings; in the absence of sufficient consensus to proceed, the Town Council decided to delete the standards for now and revisit the subject in more depth.

The proposed residential design standards were fairly modest. No architectural review board was necessary because the standards did not require subjective decisions as to architectural style or neighborhood compatibility. The standards were simple enough to be handled administratively as part of the permitting process. The proposed standards addressed only the following subjects:¹

- **GARAGE DOORS:** Garage doors that face the street would be no more than 10 feet wide; would be recessed at least 10 feet behind the front of the building; and would be less than 50% of the building's width unless recessed 30 feet.
- **DRIVEWAYS:** Driveways in front of homes that are wider than 10 feet would be constructed with a pervious surface.
- **PORCHES AND BALCONIES:** Every new building would have a porch, balcony, or stoop facing the street, which may extend into the front setback zone (but no closer than 10 feet to the right-of-way) if it had no walls or screened areas.
- **SETBACKS:** Front setbacks would be reduced from the existing rule of 25 feet to 20 feet in the RS and RM zones and to 10 feet in the RC zone. Side setbacks would have been larger for waterfront lots (to preserve glimpses of the water) and smaller for inland lots.
- **BULK:** New duplexes and single-family residences would have their bulk limited through a maximum "floor-to-area" ratio (F.A.R.) of 0.80.

¹ Most of these standards were found in §§ 34-1011–1015 of the code (copy attached).

Instead of the proposed residential design standards, chapter 34 as adopted eliminated restrictions on garage doors facing the street and on driveways; eliminated the requirement for a porch or balcony; restored the pre-existing 25-foot front setbacks; kept side setbacks the same for waterfront and inland lots; and eliminated F.A.R. controls for buildings in the RS and RC zoning districts.

At this time the LPA or Town Council may wish to begin reexamining the previously drafted standards, or may choose to consider an entirely different approach. The following background information on residential design standards is provided to aid in this decision.

BASIS FOR RESIDENTIAL DESIGN STANDARDS

The purposes of the proposed residential design standards were identified as follows:

- Enhancing the character of residential streets and neighborhoods, which are some of the most important public spaces in the Town of Fort Myers Beach.
- Encouraging traditional building forms that reinforce the pedestrian orientation and neighborly quality of the town.
- Keeping neighborhood streets from being overwhelmed by parked cars and dominant garage doors.
- Requiring the fronts of buildings to contain architectural features that transition from private space indoors to public spaces outdoors.
- Maintaining and enhancing the town's sense of place and its property values.
- Implementing the design concepts in the Fort Myers Beach Comprehensive Plan.

The basic design concepts were identified during the planning process that resulted in the adoption of the Fort Myers Beach Comprehensive Plan in late 1998. That planning process began by formulating desirable visual images of the future. Those images became the basis for preparing much of the plan's text (and its later implementing regulations).

One drawing from that process was so evocative of the desired character for residential neighborhoods that it was placed on the front cover of the plan.

This drawing showed how private homes and their front yards, combined with the streets themselves, create some of the most important public spaces in the town — its quiet residential neighborhoods.



While preparing the new LDC, three key design factors were identified that could make an enormous difference in the character of these neighborhoods as they evolve:

- **Put a porch, balcony, or stoop on the front of each new house** – A traditional feature of homes has always been to have a porch, balcony, or stoop on the street side of the house. Many new homes don't contain these features. Especially in a community where many houses are oriented toward canals, bays, or the Gulf of Mexico, the original "front" of the house (facing the street) is often neglected.
- **Oversized houses can dwarf neighborhoods** – New homes should be expected to be larger than many existing homes, but there is a point beyond which houses can become completely out of scale with existing neighborhoods. This point can be hard to determine but is best evaluated by examining recently built homes in familiar neighborhoods.
- **Don't let garage doors dominate the fronts of houses** – Probably the most unfriendly feature of many new house designs is the dominance of garage doors on the front (street) side. These designs make the street feel like an alley. The typical family now owns more cars than ever, and this trend will probably continue. Because new homes must be elevated due to floodplain regulations, the most common solution at Fort Myers Beach is to put parking on the ground level below the living area. If access to this parking is from the side, or if a side driveway leads to a rear garage (attached or detached), all parking is hidden from the street and it has virtually no impact on the surrounding neighborhood. More commonly, however, access to the parking is directly from the front, an arrangement that can be perfectly suitable or that can result in garage-dominated building fronts, based on a few basic design decisions that are usually given little thought.

One goal of residential design standards is to extend the local building traditions from Fort Myers Beach. A related goal during the inevitable rebuilding of older homes is trying to keep neighborhoods as places that people want to walk in. The proposed standards (favoring prominent porches and balconies, with garage doors slightly recessed) were deemed essential because garage-dominated facades discourage pedestrians in the same way in which blank walls and parking lots discourage pedestrians in commercial areas — by creating visual boredom that discourages walking and thus interferes with normal neighborly interactions.

Attached to this memo are several documents that are relevant to this discussion:

- One is a page of photographs of house fronts that show how some subtle design changes on the front wall of houses can change the character of the public space of neighborhoods.
- Next is a page of renderings of designs for new elevated cottages on narrow lots that manage through various techniques to keep garage doors from overwhelming their facades. (A few of these designs would not actually appear exactly as drawn because picket fences are shown where driveways are needed.)
- Also included are several articles on residential design in other communities.

NATIONAL AND LOCAL TRENDS

National building trends over the past 15 years have had less effect on Fort Myers Beach than many other places because relatively few vacant lots remained and most homes were built by local builders rather than major developers. However, some trends occur everywhere, such as the increasing luxuriousness of homes that follows from a prosperous economy, and an increasing emphasis on interior conveniences and less on the local context for the house (the character of its specific block or neighborhood).

The residential neighborhoods of Fort Myers Beach have several distinguishing characteristics:

- Lots are relatively narrow and have already been sold off to individual owners, forcing redevelopment to occur on a lot-by-lot and home-by-home basis.
- There are no alleys, making all driveways enter from the front and placing other service functions such as trash collection in the front of homes.
- The entire town is a floodplain, which requires all living area to be elevated nearly a full story above ground.
- Property values are rising dramatically. Whenever this happens, older homes without modern amenities begin to be replaced by new and typically much larger homes.

The replacement of older homes at Fort Myers Beach will soon become a major trend. In the absence of special design regulations of some kind, it is likely that these new homes will follow national trends rather than evolving from local traditions. The local tradition of smaller homes on stilts will be replaced by larger homes whose double and triple garage doors will dominate neighborhood streets. This change will erode community character and reduce the strong sense of place that is so highly valued at Fort Myers Beach.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES FOR RESIDENTIAL DESIGN STANDARDS

Many other approaches to shaping the design of homes are also possible:

- A few communities select one or more architectural styles that new homes must be based upon (for instance, Mediterranean, or cracker-style Old Florida). A local variation could be to continue the beach cottage tradition with exposed pilings, many windows, elevated decks, and cement shingles. This approach often uses an architectural review board because style decisions are necessarily somewhat subjective.
- Other communities establish an architectural review board and give it broad discretion to judge designs that are proposed by individual lot owners. No specific styles are required, but decisions are based how well the design matches or extends local traditions, or how well it integrates into the surrounding neighborhood. This approach requires a separate board to make these subjective decisions in a public forum.
- Some communities give broad discretion to an architectural review board, but instead of asking that designs be well integrated, they ask for originality and have the authority to reject designs that have already been used in the same neighborhood.
- Some communities avoid the delays and uncertainty that are inherent in architectural review boards but create specific measurable standards that can be administered by staff. The proposed residential design standards followed this model, but the standards themselves could be quite different.

NEXT STEP

The LPA has not been directed to revisit residential design standards but it may choose to do so. The purpose of the June 17 meeting is to update LPA members on the outcome of the previously proposed standards and discuss whether the LPA wishes to take a lead role in revisiting this subject.

If so, the first question is whether to carefully reexamine each of the standards previously proposed, or whether an entirely different approach should be explored before focusing on any details.

Attachments: §§ 34-1011–1015 (standards proposed BUT NOT ADOPTED in March 2003)
Photographs Illustrating Garage Door Design Alternatives
Garage Treatment in Commercially Available Cottage Designs (Sater Design)
Minor Setback (Builder, June 1999)
Snouts Are Out (Governing, November 2002)
In Praise of Bungalows (Stephanos Polyzoides, May 2000)

DIVISION 8.
RESIDENTIAL DESIGN STANDARDS

Sec. 34-1011. Purpose and intent.

The purposes of design regulations for residential buildings include:

- (1) Enhancing the character of residential streets and neighborhoods, which are some of the most important public spaces in the Town of Fort Myers Beach.
- (2) Encouraging traditional building forms that reinforce the pedestrian orientation and neighborly quality of the town.
- (3) Keeping neighborhood streets from being overwhelmed by parked cars and dominant garage doors.
- (4) Requiring the fronts of buildings to contain architectural features that transition from private space indoors to public spaces outdoors.
- (5) Maintaining and enhancing the town's sense of place and its property values.
- (6) Implementing the design concepts in the Fort Myers Beach Comprehensive Plan.

Sec. 34-1012. Applicability and compliance.

(a) *Applicability.* These residential design standards apply to all residential buildings or portions thereof that are being newly built, and to “substantial improvements” to such buildings as defined in § 6-405.

(b) *Compliance determinations.* Compliance with these standards shall be determined as follows:

- (1) An applicant may seek approval of specific building plans during the RPD rezoning process (see § 34-941).
- (2) Unless final approval has been granted pursuant to subsection (1), the director shall make a determination of substantial compliance with these standards before a development order can be issued pursuant to ch. 10 of this code, or before a building permit can be issued if a development order is not applicable. Compliance determinations of the director are administrative decisions which may be appealed in accordance with article II of this chapter.

(c) *Variances and deviations.* Requests to vary from a substantive provision of these standards may

be filed using the variance procedures in § 34-87, or may be requested during planned development rezonings as a deviation as described in § 34-932(b).

Sec. 34-1013. Residential garages and driveways.

(a) New residential garage doors must be placed so as not to dominate the fronts of buildings. See examples in Figure 34-26.

- (1) Garage doors shall be no closer to streets or other public spaces than 10 feet behind the principal plane of the building frontage.
- (2) Individual garage doors facing streets or other public spaces shall not exceed 10 feet in width.
- (3) The total width of all garage doors facing the street cannot exceed 50 percent of the total width of the building. This limitation does not apply to garage doors that are more than 30 feet behind the principal plane of the building frontage.

(b) Driveways shall be a maximum of 10 feet wide in front of the principal plane of the building. If direct access for two or more vehicles is desired, all driveways shall be constructed either with:

- (1) porous (pervious) asphalt or concrete, or
- (2) one of the alternative surfaces described in 34-2017(b)(1), or
- (3) shall consist of two parallel strips of pavement for each vehicle path, with each strip up to two feet wide with planting areas between paved strips.

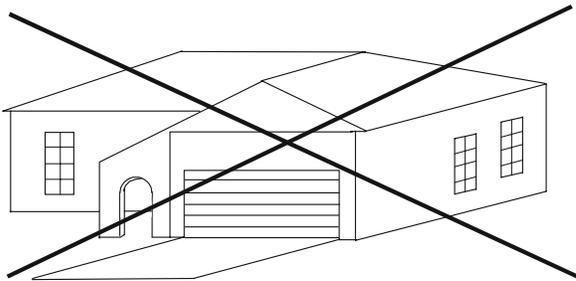
Sec. 34-1014. Residential porches, balconies, or stoops.

All residential buildings shall have at least one porch, balcony, or stoop facing the street. These porches, balconies, and stoops may extend into the street setback zone as provided in § 34-637(d)(2)b.

Sec. 34-1015. Maximum bulk of residential buildings.

The maximum bulk of residential buildings is regulated by the maximum floor area ratio established for each zoning district (see § 34-633 and Table 34-3).

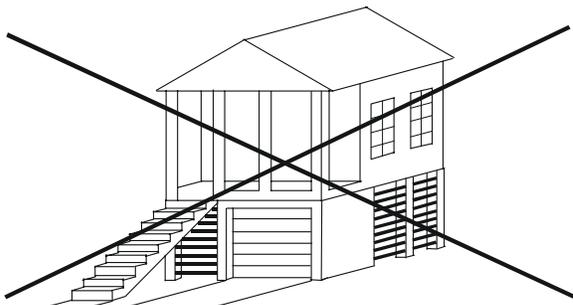
Sec. 34-1016–34-1168. Reserved.



Dominant triple garage door (ground-level house) -- **DON'T DO THIS**



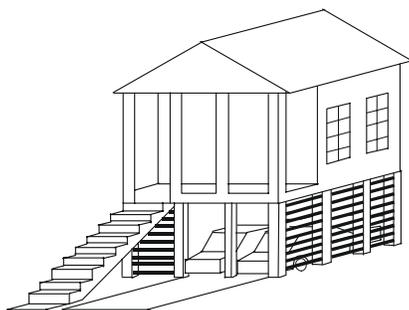
Porte cochere (ground-level house) -- **DO THIS**



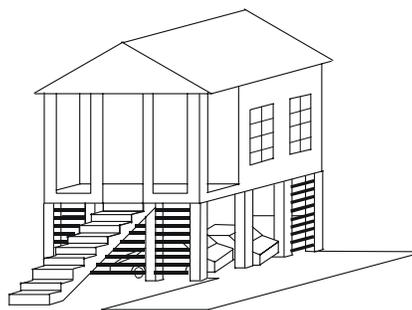
Dominant double garage door (elevated house) -- **DON'T DO THIS**



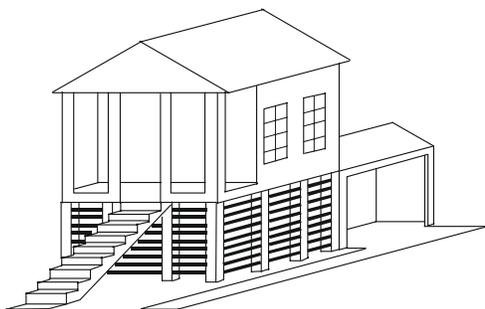
Recessed garage door (elevated house) -- **DO THIS**



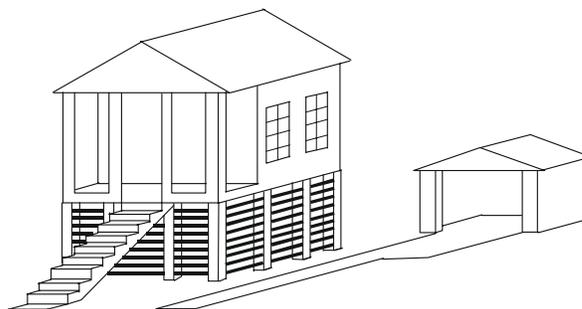
No garage door, front entry (elevated house) -- **DO THIS**



No garage door, side entry (elevated house) -- **DO THIS**



Garage attached, side entry (elevated house) -- **DO THIS**



Garage detached (elevated house) -- **DO THIS**

Figure 34-26

Photographs Illustrating Garage Door Design Alternatives

Figure 1 shows a typical stilt house with garage doors facing the street. Even with an attractive entry stairway, a porch, and a balcony, this house presents a stark face to the street.



Figure 1

Figure 2 shows a house with no garage doors at all. This arrangement is attractive (unless the garage area is not kept clean, when it can become quite unattractive!). This is the traditional building frontage in this area.



Figure 2

Figure 3 shows a standard garage door facing the street, but it is recessed slightly from the front of the house. The visual effect is to make the garage door much less dominant than the house in Figure 1.



Figure 3

Figure 4 shows a combination of a recessed single garage door and a second single garage door on a wall that is itself recessed from the front of the house. Again, garage doors are much less visually dominant when they are recessed slightly from the front wall of the house.



Figure 4

Garage Treatment in Commercially Available Cottage Designs



Minor Setback

A 70-acre park is the centerpiece of Rivermoore Park in suburban Atlanta, and architect and land planner Stephen Fuller wanted all of the front elevations to feel like extensions of that space. “There’s no way to create a beautiful street if we let the garage overpower it,” Fuller says. So he mandated that garages be pushed back from the elevation and houses moved closer to the street.

With a typical lot width of only 80 feet, and with buyers demanding big houses and three-car garages, Fuller had to get creative. He offered two configurations in the community. One is the push-back garage, which has two front-facing doors with one double deep bay;

the other is a tandem setup with a swing-in entry. The houses are evaluated on a case-by-case basis, but an average garage push-back is 15 to 20 feet. “Even when a car is parked in the driveway, it’s away from the elevation,” says Fuller. “These lots are 20 feet narrower than in comparable neighborhoods, but here, you don’t get the sense of a huge, three-car garage.”

In a competitive market like Atlanta, Rivermoore Park developer Eagle Real Estate Advisors wanted a unique community design. But builders were reluctant to change what wasn’t broken. According to Fuller, they were hesitant for four reasons: “A. It was different; B. It was different; C. It



Courtesy Rivermoore Park

A three-car garage is de-emphasized on the Parkview model, by Atlanta-based Osley Builders, creating a more pedestrian-friendly streetscape.

wasn’t the same; and D. They thought it would cost more.”

The configuration is more expensive, but it simplifies driveway construction and softens the front façade. “The benefit is a greatly

improved perception of the entry of the house,” Fuller says, “and it has [paid off] in terms of the streetscape.” Buyers agree — Rivermoore Park is on track to sell more than 100 houses this year. —C.W.

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COUNCIL MEMBERS
LPA

Snouts Are Out

American houses used to be known for their front porches. Now, just as often, it's their garages that stand out. Homes with large garages jutting out in front have become so common that architects have coined a name for them: "snout houses."

Some cities are punching snout houses in the nose. Last month, the Sacramento city council adopted new design standards for single-family homes. Proportion is in; protruding garages are out: They must now sit flush with the face of the house. Moreover, the regulations say a garage can't take up more than 50 percent of the front of the house. Sacramento will grant home-builders some exceptions, but Portland, Oregon,



banned snout houses entirely in 1999.

Are Sacramento and Portland just being fussy? The cities' planners don't think so. They believe the new rules will make neighborhoods safer and build a stronger sense of community. "Prominent garages send a message: The car is first and

the residents are second," says Jim McDonald, a senior planner in Sacramento. "People drive up, hit their garage-door openers and go inside without ever seeing their neighbors. We want people to be able to see their own front yards and their neighbors' front yards. It puts more eyes on the street."

Sacramento's standards don't stop at the garage. They encourage other basic design features, too: front doors oriented toward the street and some decorative trim on the side of the house that faces the street. In fact, the new guidelines even promote front porches.

—Christopher Swope

Annals Of Modesty

Robert Reich, candidate for governor of Massachusetts, asked by the moderator of a debate to pose a question to one of the other candidates:

"What do you think is the most admirable thing about me?"

Gutting Their Goat

Slaughtering a goat and nailing its head to a tree is no longer allowed in Sanford, North Carolina. It seems that neighbors complained about the gruesome sight and the sound of goats and chickens being butchered in the backyards of newly arrived Mexican immigrants, whose celebratory barbecue tradition begins with promenading the main dish to its demise. Now if the subur-

ban revelers choose to slay an animal at their house, they face a \$50 fine.

Sanford, about 30 miles from Raleigh, isn't the first North Carolina municipality to grapple with this cultural tradition. Monroe, in the southwest corner of the state, also passed a no-slaughter ordinance calling for a \$100 fine for the first offense of backyard slaughter, increasing to \$500 for the third violation. Ironically, Monroe's main industry is the killing of chickens at a local processing plant.

Monroe city manager Douglas Spell says that the backyard butchering wasn't widespread, but it did hap-

pen several times and the city council wanted to take steps to stop it. Council members agreed that neighbors shouldn't be subjected to the view and the hair-raising noise of the event. But Spell is sympathetic to the fact that firing up the grill, roasting meat and bringing people together to eat it is a long-practiced tradition in most cultures—though minus the fresh kill. "It's like we would have a pig picking, or something of that nature," he says. "It's an outdoor barbecue. But it doesn't involve the slaughtering, just a group of people eating."

—Ellen Perlman



In Praise of Bungalows

Stefanos Polyzoides, 25 May 2000

Sprawl builders and developers call them 'product'. They are the typical houses of suburbia. Such 'product' is ostensibly the result of marketing research - what the people want. In fact, sprawl houses are planned and built by a cartel that is dedicated to design in a single urban mode and house pattern. As a result, the middle class in this country is increasingly being denied a choice of habitat.

Arranged in tracts, with garages in the front, tract houses destroy the streetscapes that they define. Without a place for neighbors to assemble and interact, community bonds are frustrated. Excessively interiorized and poorly landscaped, they are disconnected from the larger landscape and are environmentally unfit. Poorly proportioned and detailed and hurriedly built, they are designed to and induce a rapid first sale. Minimum price and maximum size, floor area and volume, is how they are marketed.

Evidence is mounting that tracts of such houses are not increasing in value over time. Dealing with their deteriorating carcasses in second and third generation suburbs is increasingly becoming an acute crisis that many American cities have to increasingly deal with.

Yet, it was not too long ago that we knew of a production house that served the needs of successive generations of its users admirably. The California Bungalow was designed in Chicago and Saint Louis and was used as the typical house for the formation of neighborhoods and towns in the United States from 1900 to 1920.

It was light in material, modest in form, unadorned and thoroughly simple in its design, almost modern in its construction. A wooden house, the bungalow was often pre-cut and shipped by rail to the West. It is perhaps the most successful prefabricated house in a century obsessed with prefabrication, despite the chronic failure of the idea.

Its plan was general and designed for repetition. Large rooms were dedicated to public uses, small rooms to private ones. Tall ceilings and large windows brought ample light to its interiors. Bathrooms and sometimes kitchens were up to date. The house and its garden were often connected

into a single architecture through the use of porches. Functionally, the fluidity and generality of the bungalow plan allowed its use by millions of families over time to very diverse living ends. In this, the century that most revolutionized domestic technology and living patterns, the bungalow has been the ultimate flexible dwelling.

Bungalows were of an identifiable house form. Even as duplexes, triplexes or quadruplexes, they stressed their single house precedence. Refined by traditional architectural elements, doors, windows, chimneys, porches, etc they spoke to both a house that nurtured families and to a street that gathered them into a neighborhood. They symbolized a home setting and civic culture that were true to the core of this republic.

Beauty is the recognition of utility well served, design well composed and construction well executed. The beauty of the bungalows is recognized by millions today and exists both for their sheer living pleasure, and for their long term financial gain. In Pasadena, California where I live and work, there are many bungalows in neighborhood configurations that were designed for \$200 one hundred years ago and are now worth over \$400,000.

It is high time to pause and consider the mass housing options available to us today: We must turn 'product' into houses, tracts into neighborhoods and sprawl into towns and cities. The failures and successes of the last century are staring us in the face: Enough is enough.

DRAFT – TO BE REVIEWED AT SEPTEMBER 9, 2003 MEETING

FORT MYERS BEACH
LOCAL PLANNING AGENCY MEETING
JUNE 17, 2003
Town Hall - Council Chambers
2523 Estero Boulevard
FORT MYERS BEACH, FLORIDA

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting of the LPA was opened by Chair Betty Simpson on Tuesday, June 17, 2003, at 12:10 p.m..

Members present at the meeting: Betty Simpson, Harold Huber, Jessica Titus, Jane Plummer and Nancy Mulholland.

Excused absence from meeting: Anita Cereceda, Hank Zuba, Jodi Hester and Roxie Smith.

Staff present at meeting: Town Manager Marsha Segal-George, Dan Folke and Bill Spikowski.

II. INVOCATION AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Invocation was given by Chair Betty Simpson. All present assembled for the Pledge of Allegiance.

III. MINUTES: MAY 20, 2003

MOTION: Made by Harold Huber and seconded by Jessica Titus to approve the minutes of May 20, 2003 with corrections.

Corrections and changes to minutes:

1. **Harold Huber** - Page 6 (bottom) sentence pertaining to 64 square feet. Strike existing sentence and replace with "One 64 square foot sign is allowed or two 32 square foot signs."
2. **Betty Simpson** - Page 5 - Replace (?) with Bob Barter.

VOTE: Motion passes unanimously.

IV. RESIDENTIAL DESIGN STANDARDS - BILL SPIKOWSKI

Bill Spikowski reported when the LPA last saw the Land Development Code, Chapter 34, it contained the residential design standards. The Council could not reach a consensus and asked to have this removed and reviewed by the LPA. He indicated no progress has taken place and the questions point to whether residential standards should be done, what should they look like and who should get to work to prepare them? The design standards, which were in Chapter 34, tried to deal with these questioned specifically. The regulations were fairly modest and were not as stringent as the commercial regulations for the downtown area. There was not a clear consensus on how far to go with the residential design standards. One approach was the mechanical approach, which was neutral with objective criteria. This approach can be used with the standards proposed previously or with different standards. Concerns do exist with the overly objective standards, because no one is convinced that beauty will result. The objective standards can be followed and beauty will not always follow.

Harold Huber commented that he was at a meeting where a gentleman spoke and expressed he wanted to be protected as a homeowner and not allow what has happened on Hickory Blvd. by over building on a lot with a mansion. The goal on Fort Myers Beach is not to allow this to happen up and down Estero Blvd..

Bill Spikowski commented that he measured the homes on Hickory Blvd. These homes would have been slightly larger than what would have been allowed under the floor area ratios as proposed, but only by 5%. These homes do have many of the characteristics these regulations would otherwise have encouraged.

Jane Plummer expressed the Hickory Blvd. properties cannot be built on Fort Myers Beach, because they have one whole story higher than the regulations allow. Any house built in an older neighborhood will tower over any other home. Most of the older homes are built ground level. She does like the uniqueness of builders choosing different patterns. She feels there will be duplication of the same look and this is starting to happen with one builder on the island. She would like to not see such a specific design standard. The standards before the LPA do not make much sense to her. She commented on the garages and would rather see vehicles such as Jetski's, etc. placed indoors rather than scattered about the property. She would rather see cars parked in a driveway or in a garage than all over the street. She indicated a 10-foot setback will not allow a car in the driveway. She is for removing residential standards, because other restrictions are in place. She does not feel the design standards work with the lots on Fort Myers Beach.

Additional discussion took place with regard to the type of surface which would be used in a driveway that is more than the 10-foot. Bill Spikowski explained it could consist of porous asphalt or concrete, which looks basically the same as regular asphalt or concrete, but when sprayed with a hose the water will sink through. Pavers can also be used. This is more a drainage than an esthetic issue.

Jessica Titus is opposed to seeing the Ted's Sheds and canvas coverings in the front.

Chair Betty Simpson feels the pictures provided by Bill Spikowski are very nice.

Town Manager Segal-George provided additional information. There was a lot of discussion with the Council with regard to design regulations and the floor area ratio. Both were dropped out of Chapter 34. There were some strong feelings on both sides from those that did or did not want them. These are before the LPA, because there was discussion on the part of the Council to drop out these items if it would be sent back to the LPA for study. She spoke to the Council members and the members had expressed they liked the Comp. Plan. When the regulations are put in place to make the Comp. Plan real this is where the problem begins. She is unsure of the answer, but feels a connection may take place with pictures. What is it about the Comp. Plan vision everyone likes, but when it gets to regulations it is lost? She is unsure of the answer. Even though the majority of the Council did not want to include the design regulations or the floor area ratio they all did express an interest in it. There is tremendous activity on redevelopment with the area. The Council has hopes the LPA will come up with an idea to work and then they may review. The place to begin is from the Comp. Plan.

Nancy Mulholland felt a stronger connection reviewing the material the second time vs. the first. She did feel they were intruding too much, but she is now feeling some of the items must be addressed in order to reach their vision. She is still unsure what the floor area ratio would do for them. Why is it better than having setbacks or building heights?

Bill Spikowski replied the floor area ratio is not essential. Many communities regulate only by setbacks. The incentives on small lots are to make the house build out to every setback and the result ends up being square type homes. The reason he suggested the floor area ratio for residential is to combine with making the setbacks more lenient. This would keep away from a less box type home but keep them from becoming overly large. The residential design standards were completed on a low budget to make a point. He commented on a book just reprinted by the Department of Community Affairs and indicated he would try to get this for the committee. These homes are of a more traditional style on the smaller lot. With more realistic type drawings may help the LPA try to write the regulations.

Jane Plummer suggested taking some photos of the larger homes which look gorgeous on the 50-foot lots. She does not feel all homes must be the same.

Bill Spikowski added pictures could be taken of real houses on narrower lots that are stilt homes. A designer or illustrator could re-sketch with variations.

Town Manager Segal-George reviewed the pictures can be obtained by Jane and this can be copied to everyone. The book suggested by Bill Spikowski would be interesting to look at, if it can be obtained. More information can be obtained and will be back on the agenda in September or October.

Harold Huber commented that he feels the intent is to leave the garage door where it is, but bring the porch out 10-feet. This is not making the backyard smaller. He does not want to see a 36-foot house straight across the front. He would rather see a porch to break up the front wall.

Bill Spikowski feels some ideas have been obtained today to move forward. A deadline is not in place and they can move forward at their own pace.

V. LPA MEMBER ITEMS AND REPORTS

Harold Huber - Discussed the toilets at the Golf Course. He expressed Town Manager Segal-George indicated when they get to Chapter 14 this would be covered and they would need to be hooked up at that point. He questioned what chapter they will move into next.

Dan Folke expressed that Chapter 10 would be the appropriate Chapter and is the only one left.

Town Manager Segal-George added that the mandatory hook up ordinance was the County's which expired. She felt these would fall under Chapter 10, which will be dealt within the fall.

Jane Plummer - Questioned why the residential design standards are being brought up again? She indicated there were viable reasons why these would not work and why is this being discussed again? Town Manager Segal-George replied the Town Council asked this be brought before the LPA. Jane indicated she spoke to a Council member who indicated they did not remember this request.

Dan Folke added that Terry Cain agreed to take these out as long as it came back before the LPA to look at a more comprehensive manner.

Nancy Mulholland - Brought an interesting idea to the LPA, which was expressed to her. The idea is to have businesses put a trolley stop on their property and have advertising of their own business instead of having them dropped here or there.

Town Manager Segal-George explained the Trolley's stop in the road and within the right-of-way area. This is the reason they need to be located in these areas. Estero is controlled by the County as well as LeeTran. The County was offering alternatives and the Council picked the alternative they liked the best being offered. The County was in control. She recalls the Council did not want the benches on private property, because of the difficulty of controlling the design. The intent is to upgrade the benches. She feels an arrangement has been established with the County.

Dan Folke added that bench signs are allowed only at beach accesses, Trolley stops and internal to a property.

Nancy questioned if the new sign ordinance is being enforced? Dan Folke indicated Ginny Ross went on a trip about two days after the sign ordinance was adopted. Dave Crabtree is doing basic enforcement and when she comes back on Monday more stringent enforcement will take place.

Betty Simpson - Questioned the Beach House? Town Manager Segal-George replied this was approved as a condominium.

Dan Folke - Reported the Historic Preservation Subcommittee meeting will be held next Tuesday.

VI. PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

VII. ADJOURN

The meeting was adjourned at 1:20 p.m..

Respectfully Submitted,

speeding up on straight stretches.

A comfortable six-foot sidewalk on each side of the street, plus one lane of parking and two 10-foot traffic lanes adds up to a width of 40 feet. If the ordinance asks for a 50-foot right of way the other 10 feet should be divided into verges between the sidewalk and the street. Sixty feet should ordinarily be reserved for unusually important streets. A cartway in a one-way alley shouldn't need to be wider than 16 feet, and could be less. (6.12) The cost difference between the 40 feet of cartway in some suburban streets and the 28 feet of cartway in a better-designed street is almost enough to pay for an alley. Of course, if a boulevard with a landscaped center island is designed for a neighborhood, then the right of way will be wider.

Making a Neighborhood Friendly to Pedestrians

People will walk for five or 10 minutes, but, as William H. Whyte observed, you have to keep them interested if you want them to walk at all. So making a residential district small enough to be walkable is not sufficient by itself; the design has to encourage people to walk. Some ways to do this:

1. Keep the Garage Doors off the Street Front

When houses had stables, it went without saying that they belonged away from the house and at the back of the lot. When the horseless carriage arrived, it remained the custom for garages to be set back from the street. Well-designed early suburbs, like Forest Hills Gardens, enforced garage setbacks through community regulations. Garages in city neighborhoods often faced the alleys, still a good arrangement. Small houses had one-car garages, and, if they were on narrow lots, often shared driveways with the house next-door. Gradually, as the two-car garage became more usual and houses became less pretentious, the garage worked its way to the front.

Walking by a garage door is not as interesting as walking by the windows and doors of a house, and, when a small house has a two-car garage facing front, half of the street facade of the house is going to be garage door. On a street with small lots, even more of what a pedestrian sees will be garage doors. If the builder is trying to save money on paving driveways, the garages may be pulled out to within 20 feet of the sidewalk, and the house tucked in behind. The street frontage can then become almost all garage door.

This is why city designers often promote regulations that garage doors should be set back from the street or, even better, face away from the street. This does not normally mean going back to the pre-World-War II practice of building garages as separate structures at the back of the lot. People have become accustomed to the convenience of using their garage door opener to drive straight in and then enter the house directly from the garage.

2. Use Alleys or Lanes

On narrow lots there is no substitute for entering the garage from an alley or lane, if the front of the garage is to be kept away from the street. Builders object to alleys because they are paying to build a second street. On the other hand, they should be able to save money on paving driveways—as the alley is essentially a collective driveway—and also save money on paving streets if they follow sensible cartway dimensions. To make the alley cost-effective, it is probably necessary to let home builders provide only a five-foot apron between the garage and the paved surface of the alley. Requiring a 20-foot setback of garage doors from the alley eliminates some of its cost competitiveness. Alleys can be made one-way and provided with speed bumps to ensure the safety of cars entering and exiting garages close to the alley. Alleys are also a good place for trash collection and for locating utility wires. Above-ground utility wires may be acceptable in an alley location where they would not be on the street front.

Shared driveways have become less satisfactory now that most people own more than one car. It is too easy to leave one car in the driveway and go out in the other one, leaving the neighbor blocked and frustrated. So house lots without alleys have to be big enough to allow for a full driveway to bypass the house. On these larger lots, driveways can bypass the house and swing around to garages entered from the side or rear, or there can be a turnaround and the garage can be built into the house but entered from the side. Front-facing garages can also be acceptable on a larger lot, if they are at the side of the house and set back a reasonable distance like 25 feet from the front of the house.

3. Keep the Houses Close to the Street

A wide expanse of perfectly manicured front lawn is certainly impressive, but it is a lot of work to keep up and not much use to anyone. Most people want a large lot so they can have a big back yard. Big front and side yards are a setting for the house but generally are not worth having unless the whole lot is so big that the back yard is as large as it needs to be anyway. So, as house lots get smaller, it makes sense to pull the house toward the street. Houses that are within hailing distance of the street help keep a neighborhood friendly and interesting to walk through.

Front porches and picket fences have become in some people's minds the hallmark of good neighborhood planning. Seaside, its design based on streets in Key West, encouraged front porches on all the houses as well as white picket fences around the yards. People out for a walk after dinner can say hello to people sitting out on their front porches, so that a walk becomes a social occasion.

Seaside is a resort designed to recreate the summer places that people remember from their childhood, or, more likely, wish they remembered from their childhood. Sitting on the front porch is part of the deal, so people conscientiously do it. While traditional resort houses had wrap-around verandahs, this architectural feature vanished from most other houses before World War I. Narrow city rowhouses often continued to have front porches, and, before air conditioning, people would sit outside on the porch in the evenings because it was far more comfortable than sitting in the house. In more affluent neighborhoods, the front porch had long been replaced by the screened side or back porch, an outdoor room with cushioned furniture.

From the street the side porch was revealed by the glow of parchment-shaded bridge lamps filtering through the cedars and azaleas.

But porch life everywhere has been strongly affected by air-conditioning and television on the one hand, which tend to keep people inside the house, and more active outdoor lifestyles, with people cooking at the barbecue or sitting by the backyard pool, rather than on a porch.

Does it make sense to build front porches to restore a tradition that vanished a long time ago, and for many people never existed at all? Maybe. Sometimes people with front-facing garages turn them into porches by leaving the door open and sitting there in lawn chairs, a sad commentary on the inadequacies of typical suburban design. Most houses have some kind of shelter over the front door, and extending that shelter to be big enough to hold a few chairs is not a big incremental cost. The symbolism of the front porch is desirable, a way of inviting people into the zone of the house, without having to worry if the house itself is presentable. But the front porch is not a necessity in creating a livable neighborhood. It is more important to keep the front door relatively close to the street.

Although they look charming in Key West and Seaside, frontyard picket fences are a maintenance nightmare, unless you have Tom Sawyer to organize their upkeep for you. And, so far, vinyl fences are not convincing in real life although they may look appropriate in photographs. Enclosing front lawns with fences, walls, or hedges is the usual practice in England. The American tradition is to leave the front yard unfenced, so that the front lawns and planting merge into a continuous garden landscape. And if there are going to be front fences, it is important that everyone do it, as a street where some yards are fenced and others are not seldom looks right. Fencing back yards for privacy makes perfect sense, but fences are likely to be taller and less transparent than pickets.

4. *Provide a Network of Open Spaces*

Clarence Perry suggested that 10 percent of the land area in a neighborhood

be set aside for parks and open space. Some of that land goes to the school and parks that are focal points for different places within the neighborhood, other land may be steep slopes and parts of the local drainage network.

5. *Find a Way to Have a Neighborhood Store*

Walking to a neighborhood store is one of the conveniences of urban neighborhoods, but unless there are more than 35 housing units per acre throughout the neighborhood, it is difficult to provide the customer base even for a convenience store. Clarence Perry recognized in his neighborhood diagram that shops had to be located on the perimeter arterial streets at the interface of two or more neighborhoods, meaning that some customers arrive by car. Seaside has some retailers in its town center, but they are exclusive specialty shops that serve a larger area. At Seaside you can walk from your cottage to the town center for morning coffee and a muffin, but the 27 different brands of olive oil on the shelves indicate you are not in an ordinary corner store. Developers of some planned communities have decided that a convenience store is an amenity, like a park, and has to be provided even if the operators can't pay an economic rent. Through a process of trial and error, as different tenants try to survive in these neighborhood store spaces, a bakery restaurant is emerging as a business likely to survive and prosper in such a setting. People come for breakfast, lunch, or a light dinner, and can pick up some household necessities and luxuries at the same time.

REDESIGNING CITIES

Principles, Practice, Implementation

Jonathan Barnett, FAICP

Foreward by Sen. Lincoln Chafee

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Designing Rules

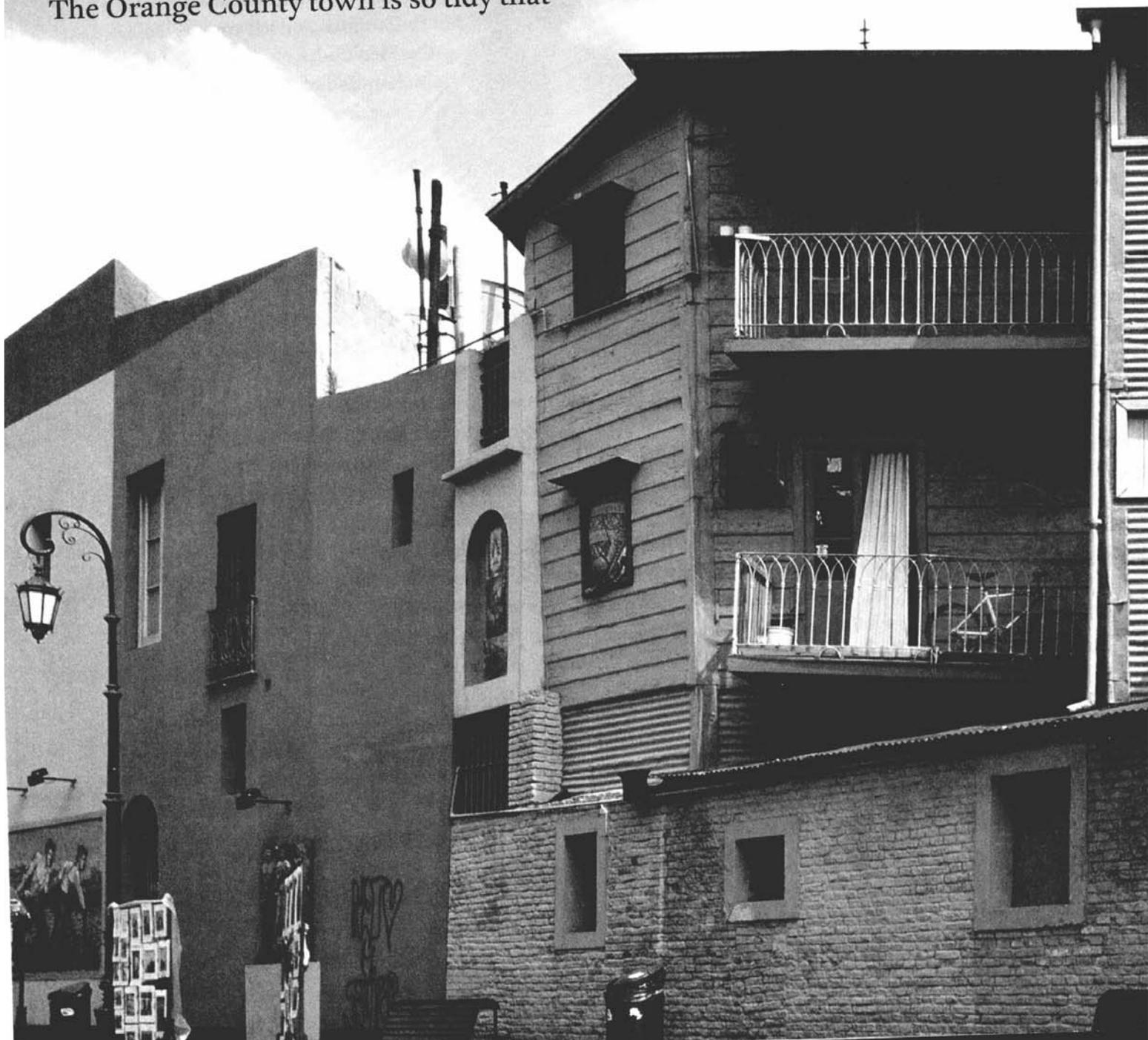
Making room for different tastes

Virginia Postrel

IRVINE, CALIFORNIA, IS the epitome of tightly controlled urban design, a squeaky-clean edge city of office parks and master-planned neighborhoods. The Orange County town is so tidy that

when my husband started teaching at the University of California campus there he couldn't find a gas station.

I've come here to talk with Steve



Kellenberg, who creates master plans for large-scale developments that sell more than 1,000 homes a year. These “high-production, high-velocity” businesses represent the present and future of American home construction, supplying the booming suburbs of the Sunbelt. I’d heard Kellenberg tell an audience of developers about survey data showing that 63 percent of buyers in master-planned communities want more diversity, while only 32 percent want their neighborhood to look consistent.

That was what I wanted to hear. Like many variety-loving city dwellers, I’m leery of master-planned communities, even though I know they’re extremely popular. It’s bad enough that even my little 18-unit townhouse complex has ridiculously conformist rules—no plants by the front door, no

non-neutral window coverings, no door decorations except around Christmas—but at least our homes are literally connected to each other, making the cost of spillovers high. I can’t imagine wanting to live in a whole neighborhood of similar uniformity.

But people really are different.

During the last two decades, master-planned communities with standardized styles and prescriptive “pattern books” have become the norm for large-scale home developments. These communities sell predictability. While old-line suburbs started out fairly uniform to keep down construction costs, owners could (and did) dramatically transform their properties over time. Master-planned developments, by contrast, seek to control changes. Buyers are bound by contract to abide by rules designed to preserve a certain look and feel.

The Highlands Ranch community in Colorado, for instance, limits house numbers to no more than six inches tall and kids’ backyard clubhouses to no more than 24 square feet. No white picket fences are allowed in most neighborhoods. An enforcement team cruises the streets looking for such offenses as deviant home colors. (A light purple house got neighbors particularly riled up.) A competing community, Prospect New Town, takes a contrasting tack, going so far as to require striking colors on its houses—no Highlands Ranch neutrals allowed. Prospect, too, tightly regulates

Building appearance is getting the sort of government scrutiny once reserved for public health and safety. A 1993 survey found that 83 percent of American cities had some form of design review to control building looks.

its environment. The developers require changes on 95 percent of the new house plans submitted for their approval. “It sounds harsh,” says one developer. “But somebody’s taste has to prevail, or else it would be anarchy.”

In this case, the taste enforcement occurs within a voluntary, profit-sensitive development that has to compete with nearby alternatives offering radically different design philosophies. Homebuyers select the design regime that fits their personalities and lifestyles, and business success depends on design rules that please potential residents. But such restrictions aren’t limited to competing contractual communities. The public sector has jumped into the act, bringing similarly uniform standards to

property owners who don’t necessarily want them.

Building appearance is getting the sort of government scrutiny once reserved for public health and safety. A 1993 survey found that 83 percent of American cities and towns had some form of design review to control building looks, usually on purely aesthetic (as opposed to historic preservation) grounds. Three-quarters of these regulations, covering 60 percent of cities and towns, were passed after 1980, an adoption rate survey author Brenda Case Scheer compares to that of “zoning in the 1930s.” The trend appears to have accelerated in the late ’90s.

Some communities prescribe design rules in detailed *dos* and *don’ts*. Others use general terms like *appropriate* and *compatible*, illustrated with drawings showing acceptable and unacceptable examples. Scheer, now the dean of the Graduate School of Architecture at the University of Utah, recalls a suburb that had no specific rules at all, allowing the design review board to outlaw whatever members happened to dislike. The result was an ad hoc checklist of idiosyncratic no-nos. “The *strangest* things,” she says, “like they didn’t want to have any windows with round tops on them. The decking on a deck couldn’t run diagonally. If you had shutters, your shutters had to be able to close.”

That town isn’t an isolated example. Architectural review boards, planning commissions, and city councils often have broad discretion to determine and enforce taste

standards, from mandating roof lines and window styles to specifying what kinds of trees can be planted. Minutes of routine meetings record officials opining that the red leaves of ornamental bushes will clash with the brick of a shopping center sign and instructing a housing developer to build more single-story homes on certain streets. In one town, a city council member praised the beauty of Bradford pear trees, while in another an official condemned them as an “epidemic.”

People are different.

During our visit, Steve Kellenberg comes back to that message again and again, expressing a tolerance that arises as much from relentless pragmatism as from liberal idealism. If you’re in the business of designing environments people will pay money to live in, you can’t kid yourself about what they value. You can’t design your idea of utopia and force everyone to conform to it; if you try, everyone who isn’t just like you will go elsewhere to find a home.

Unlike me, some people really do prefer uniformity to variety, regardless of cost. Not everybody thinks it’s bad if every house on the street looks pretty much like every other one, or if people can’t change their houses much over time. Some people *like* that sort of predictability. It makes them feel secure, at home in their neighborhood. Even if cost were no object, not everybody would want the same thing I’d pick.

“We have this incredible tendency to overgeneralize about the population and to say, ‘Everybody wants this—everybody wants to live in a community where you can’t paint your house unless it’s the right color and you have to close your garage door,’” says Kellenberg. “Well, the fact is that there really are a lot of people who want that kind of controlled, predictable environment,” often because they’ve had bad experiences in deteriorating neighborhoods. “And there are others that find that an incredibly repressive regime and wouldn’t live there if you *gave* them a house, because they believe there should be an organic, fluid, self-expressive environment.”

People are different.

“You have people in Irvine that love living in Irvine,” he says. “And you have people that moved to Irvine and leave after five years because they hate it, and they move to Seal Beach or Santa Ana,” nearby towns with few design restrictions. In a diverse society, some people will indeed want a lot of rules, “but it clearly isn’t something that is *the right way* of doing it for everybody.” Neither is the alternative.

People are different.

Even those survey statistics are misleading aggregates.

Some people care a lot about diversity; others really, really want consistency. A lot are in the middle. Some people want to be sure to run into their neighbors. Others just want to stay in with their big-screen TVs or to socialize with the friends they already have. Some people want to be able to walk to the store without seeing a car. Others want to be able to drive in and out easily. The difference isn’t one of demographics—age, income, education, and so on—but of identity and attitude. You can find people shopping for houses in the same price range, for the same size families, who want all sorts of different neighborhood designs.

What the survey numbers actually say is that part of the housing market has been underserved. For years, large-scale developers have focused so much on those homebuyers who want a predictable environment and the most house for the money that they’ve ignored people with other preferences. Offer the long-ignored groups a different sort of design, and they’ll reward you handsomely. This pragmatic, trial-and-error process of discovering new sources of aesthetic value is less grandiose, and perhaps less inspiring, than the ideological search for the one best way to live. But it is also less divisive and venomous.

You can see its latest products in the spanking new streets of Ladera Ranch, a huge new development about a half-hour drive southeast of Irvine. A blue-gray Cape Cod home, with the deeply sloping roof of its saltbox ancestors, sits next to an updated beige and brown Craftsman with a low-pitched roof. Down the street is a Spanish colonial with a red-tile roof, and around the corner a stuccoed house whose turret recalls the fantasy homes of 1920s Los Angeles. Although many garages face the street, most are recessed so they don’t dominate the landscape. You see porches and yards and sidewalks—social space. And between the sidewalk and street is something no new Southern California community has gotten in a generation: a small parkway planted with trees, spindly today but promising charm and shade as the neighborhood ages.

These are mass-produced homes, with metal windows and Hardiboard concrete siding rather than wood. They’d never pass purists’ tests of authenticity. But they offer something genuine and rare—variation in more than façade, rooflines and massing that match their styles, a street of different colors and different forms. Built on the empty hill-sides of what once really was a ranch, Ladera Ranch is turning the previously unfulfilled desire for varied and sociable neighborhoods into extraordinary profits. The development sells 1,200 houses a year for prices 10 percent to 14 percent higher per square foot than in the more conventional com-

munity right next door. The landscaping and construction quality cost more, acknowledges Kellenberg, but even accounting for those costs, “it still appears that there’s a 7 to 10 percent lift in the base values that can only be explained by people being willing to pay more to live there.”

People are different.

Specialization pays. “There really is a lot of the market that doesn’t want everything to look the same, that does want to have individuality in their home, that does want a diversity of neighborhoods, that wants [the design] to feel like it grew out of the heritage of the place, that are interested in meeting their neighbors, that would enjoy having the street designed as a social space, that would like to have other social spaces and social opportunities that they could participate in,” he says.

Ladera Ranch’s design owes much to the New Urbanism, a planning philosophy that favors high densities, limited setbacks, and old-fashioned Main Streets. Both put an emphasis on community, and both understand streets as social spaces. But Kellenberg dismisses the New Urbanism’s one-size-fits-all doctrines, its “singular mission” that “rejects everything other than New Urbanism.” Lots of beloved neighborhoods, he notes, don’t conform to New Urbanist prescriptions.

The design for Ladera Ranch isn’t New Urbanism. It’s specialization—specialization within specialization, in fact. The development includes four different neighborhood styles, each crafted to suit a different personality and lifestyle. And if you want something different, you don’t have to buy a place in Ladera Ranch. You can go next door. There’s something for everyone and, if there isn’t, a smart developer will figure out how to fill in the gaps.

The seeming homogeneity of master-planned communities—the planning that gives them a bad name among intellectuals—turns out to be real-world pluralism once you realize that everyone doesn’t have to live within the same design boundaries. Community designs and governance structures are continuously evolving, offering new models to compete with the old. This pluralist approach may overturn technocratic notions of how city planning should work, but it’s the way towns are in fact developing in the United States, suggesting that these institutions offer real benefits to residents. From 1970 to 2002, the number of American housing units in homeowner associations, including condominiums and cooperatives, rose from 1 percent to 17 percent, with more than half of all new units in some areas in these associations.

As an alternative or supplement to large-scale local

government, some economists (notably Robert Nelson of the University of Maryland) and legal scholars (such as Robert Ellickson of Yale) have begun debating ways to let homeowners who aren’t in private associations form them, whether for whole neighborhoods or just a few blocks. Some proposals envision the privatization of former city services such as garbage collection and zoning-style regulations. Others involve only a specialized complement to city governance, with special fees to cover services that people in that small area particularly value. For instance, Ellickson suggests, “if artists were to concentrate their studios on a particular city block, their [Block Improvement District] could make unusually heavy expenditures on street sculptures. Indeed, the prospect of forming a Block Improvement District might encourage artists to cluster together in the first place.”

Some of these plans would require unanimous agreement, others a supermajority. The question of whether new boundaries can be drawn around residents without their individual consent is a difficult one. If unanimous agreement is necessary, a single holdout can make everyone worse off. But retroactively limiting what property owners can do with their homes raises the same problems that allowing small districts is supposed to avoid.

This problem is especially great when the new district isn’t truly self-governing. Many cities, for instance, allow a supermajority of homeowners to petition to make their neighborhood a historic district subject to special aesthetic controls—potentially a good model of specialized design boundaries. Unfortunately, historic districts usually have to conform to procedures established by a higher level of government. They can’t create processes and rules tailored to the wishes of those they govern. In Los Angeles, for instance, a Historic Preservation Overlay Zone is regulated by a five-member board. Unlike a homeowner association board, members are appointed by city officials and other board members, and only three of the five must be residents of the area they govern. Since residents don’t have a direct vote, they can’t easily predict, or check, the board’s actions.

Even some preservation activists admit to concerns. Adriene Biondo, a San Fernando Valley resident who’s campaigning to make her neighborhood a historic zone, says she isn’t looking to crush individual homeowners’ self-expression, only to raise awareness of the history and value of the neighborhood’s mid-century Eichler homes. But some local preservationists are sticklers for architectural authenticity, narrowly defined. If the board is captured by purists, admits Biondo, it might even outlaw the pistachio-

green siding she and her husband chose to match their vintage car. “I don’t think we’d like that too much ourselves,” she says.

Even in the best of circumstances, small, self-governing districts wouldn’t eliminate aesthetic conflict. Neither do master-planned communities. As anyone who’s lived in a small condo complex knows, even small groups of people disagree. Governance rules simply provide processes for resolving disputes. And they help people know what to expect, avoiding the nasty surprises and bitter conflicts that result when aesthetic rules are imposed after the fact. The best we can hope for isn’t perfection but fairness, predictability, and a reasonable chance of finding rules that suit our individual preferences. The advantage of narrow boundaries is that if all else fails, we can vote with our feet, not only improving our own situation but sending a signal that the competition is offering a better design package.

The more difficult it is for people to enter and exit—to find design rules to their liking—the more general the rules need to be. A four-block special district can have very prescriptive rules that would be inappropriate for an entire city. A metropolitan area like Orange County that is made up of many smaller cities can offer a range of city-level design regimes.

In larger areas, one way to accommodate different tastes within an overall sense of structure is to make the rules fairly generic. Consider the difference between a work uniform, a requirement to wear black, and a general prescription for “business casual.” All three establish an organizational identity, but each allows more individual choice and flexibility than the previous one, accommodating a wider range of appearance and personality. To attract a diverse group of employees, to avoid turning off independent or creative individuals, or simply to stay up to date as fashions change, it may be better to keep the dress code as general as possible.

Along similar lines, Brenda Scheer suggests that urban design regulations should pay more attention to the urban forms that are hard to change and concentrate less on the stylistic details that are easily altered. It’s easy enough to

To attract a diverse group of employees, to avoid turning off independent or creative individuals, or simply to stay up to date as fashions change, it may be better to keep the dress code as general as possible.

ignore a single building you don’t like, especially once it’s been around a while. But street widths, setbacks, and lot sizes affect the whole experience of being in a particular neighborhood. They establish the underlying structure that creates the sense of place. “If you get the lots right and the blocks right and the street right and the setbacks right, somebody can build a crummy house and it will sit there for 30 years, and somebody will tear it down and build a nice one,” she says. “There’s a kind of self-healing process that’s available if the structure is fine.”

This model allows for flexibility, personal expression, and change while still preserving a coherent underlying design. It echoes the pattern identified by Stewart Brand in *How Buildings Learn*, which exam-

ines how buildings are adapted to new uses over time. Brand explores what makes architecture resilient and capable of “learning” as its purposes change. A building, he notes, contains six nested systems: Site, Structure (the foundation and load-bearing elements), Skin (the exterior), Services (wiring, plumbing, heating, etc.), Space plan (the interior layout), and Stuff. The further out the nested system, the more permanent. Moving around furniture (Stuff) is easy; altering a foundation (Structure) is difficult.

In a building, Brand writes, “the lethargic slow parts are in charge, not the dazzling rapid ones. Site dominates Structure, which dominates the Skin, which dominates the Services, which dominate the Space plan, which dominates the Stuff. How a room is heated depends on how it relates to the heating and cooling Services, which depend on the energy efficiency of the Skin, which depends on the constraints of the Structure....The quick processes provide originality and challenge, the slow provide continuity and constraint.”

A well-designed, adaptable building, Brand argues, respects the different speeds and different functions of these nested layers. It keeps them separate, allowing “slippage” so that the quick inner layers can change without disrupting the more permanent systems. (You don’t have to tear up the foundation to fix the plumbing.)

Scheer’s proposal applies a similar model to the surrounding environment. She essentially adds a seventh layer

we can call the Street. By limiting design restrictions to the Street, Site, and possibly Structure, rather than the usual obsession with Skin, she makes room for evolution and learning. Like Brand, she emphasizes the effects of time. Given enough slippage between outer and inner layers, we can correct flaws and adapt to changing circumstances while preserving some underlying sense of order. A city, she says, is “a living thing, it’s a changing thing, and it has to adapt or it dies. A city that is not having a continuous renewal is a dying place.”

A dynamic model of city life recognizes that not just purposes or technologies change over time. So do tastes. Like Capri pants and stiletto heels, aesthetic styles go in and out of fashion, flipping from positive to negative and back again. Hard as it is to believe today, from the end of World War II until the 1980s the Art Deco hotels of Miami Beach were considered “tacky, in bad taste, and old fashioned.” When the Miami Design Preservation League was formed in 1976, recalls one of its founders, South Beach “was considered a disgrace to the city, because of its cheap neon lights, ‘funny-shaped’ buildings, and the signs along Ocean Drive blaring ‘rooms \$5 a week.’”

Similarly, American tastemakers have for decades condemned neon signs as the epitome of commercial tackiness, and many cities continue to ban neon. Others, however, have rediscovered the lively pleasures of the lights. While some neighboring cities such as Santa Monica have been forcing businesses to take down their neon signs, Los Angeles has spent about a half million dollars helping building owners restore and relight historic neon signs. The city’s Museum of Neon Art not only preserves vintage signs but lends them to the popular Universal CityWalk outdoor shopping area. Commercial neon has slowly regained its 1920s status as a source of public pleasure.

The built environment is filled with once-scorned designs that have become architectural touchstones or popular icons. When it was new, a critic called the Golden Gate Bridge an “eye-sore to those living and a betrayal of future generations.” Writing in *Architectural Record*, critic Suzanne Stephens provides a wide-ranging tour of similar examples:

Aesthetics may be a form of expression, but it doesn’t enjoy the laissez-faire treatment accorded speech or writing. To the contrary, the more significant look and feel become, the more they tend to be restricted by law.

“In 1889 artists, architects, and writers, including Charles Garnier and Guy de Maupassant, called the Eiffel Tower ‘useless and monstrous.’ Frank Lloyd Wright’s Larkin Building in Buffalo was deemed ‘ugly’ by eminent critic Russell Sturgis in [*Architectural*] RECORD in 1908, and in 1959 his Guggenheim Museum was dismissed by visionary architect Frederick Kiesler. In 1931 Lewis Mumford charged that New York’s Chrysler Building by William Van Alen was full of ‘inane romanticism’ and ‘void symbolism.’” Some of the world’s most beloved buildings and architects have been dismissed by their contemporaries. Tolerating strange styles can create significant value over time, as the unfamiliar becomes familiar, leading to aesthetic appreciation.

Aesthetics may be a form of expression, but it doesn’t enjoy the laissez-faire treatment accorded speech or writing. To the contrary, the more significant look and feel become, the more they tend to be restricted by law. The very power of beauty encourages people to become absolutists—to insist that other people’s stylistic choices, or their tradeoffs between aesthetics and other values, constitute environmental crimes. Individuals may expect more expressive freedom for themselves, but they often feel affronted and victimized by the aesthetic choices of others. This is particularly true for places, the touchstone category of our aesthetic era.

Yet now that people increasingly care about look and feel in their private choices, aesthetic regulation is less necessary to control blatant public ugliness. The same taste shift that has made the spread of design review politically viable is slowly but surely changing the definition of what’s commercially necessary. Our greatest fears of the aesthetic future are not of too little design, but of too much. ■

Virginia Postrel (vpostrel@dynamist.com) is the author of *The Substance of Style: How the Rise of Aesthetic Value Is Remaking Commerce, Culture, and Consciousness* (HarperCollins), from which this article is adapted.

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