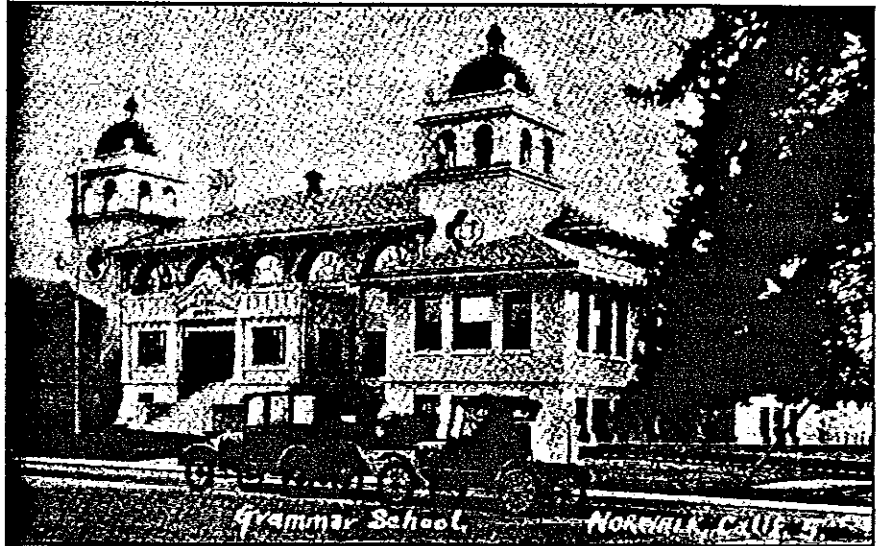


H. Community Design



I. Goals and Opportunities

Since most people receive their first impressions and, ultimately, establish their permanent perceptions of Norwalk based on the visual environment, the appearance of the City is a critical concern. Furthermore, many persons will base economic and social decisions upon their judgement of the City's physical condition. Therefore, the community's preservation, and attainment of a greater future are, in part, dependent upon the ability of the City to create an appealing visual setting.

The purpose of the Community Design Element is not to prescribe specific changes to the visual environment, nor establish particular guidelines. Instead, the intent is twofold. First, through the Community Design Element, the City of Norwalk establishes that urban design, architecture, and the

The City of Norwalk General Plan
CITYWIDE ELEMENTS - COMMUNITY DESIGN

overall appearance of the City and its parts are concerns that necessitate planning and action. In essence, form will not be ignored in pursuit of a perfectly functioning community.

Second, this element is intended to discuss, in a broad context, the various issues related to residential, commercial, industrial, and public facility and right-of-way design, hence, the elements of a well designed community. At the end, a community design plan, with goals, policies, and implementation measures, is provided.

It should be noted that this element focuses on design issues related to the form of physical development, rather than the functional design, which is the scope of the other General Plan elements. Though the table below does not include all of the design concerns from the various elements, it does elicit some of the functional design issues that should be considered:

The City of Norwalk General Plan
CITYWIDE ELEMENTS - COMMUNITY DESIGN

SAMPLING OF FUNCTIONAL DESIGN ISSUES IN GENERAL PLAN	
Element	Design Issues
Land Use	Site plans and building appearance must take into account adjacent land uses. Where different land uses, such as commercial and residential, are adjacent, the site design should provide adequate buffering.
Circulation	To encourage adequate circulation, new development should be designed to support pedestrian and public transit activity, as well as alternative modes of transportation. Attractive internal sidewalks within a development, and pedestrian passageways from the public sidewalk, for example, are methods of linking a development to a larger transportation system.
Utility Infrastructure	Every development requires the use of utilities, which should be placed out of public view, to the extent possible.
Housing	Floor plans should be adequate to meet the needs of all household sizes, and should provide for a safe and decent living environment.
Educational and Cultural Resources	Historical buildings should be preserved; new development should not detract from the historical character established by a historic landmark and, instead, should allow the historical site to serve as the primary design focus and element of a neighborhood.
Open Space	Recreational space should be provided within a development that will be private and usable.
Noise	Noise sources should be minimized and shielded to the greatest extent possible.
Safety	Security can be facilitated through the creation of "defensible spaces", and can be facilitated through adequate lighting.
Conservation	Unique natural features should be preserved on a site and protected through design.

Again, each element contains its own complete range of goals, objectives, policies, and implementation measures. Thus, the interrelatedness of elements becomes apparent and, likewise, the fact that good community design results from a synthesis of function and form becomes apparent. Notwithstanding the importance of functional design, the City of Norwalk also expresses its concern for the pure form of development. In this light, the elements of community design are discussed below. The City's commitment to design is exemplified by the following

The City of Norwalk General Plan
CITYWIDE ELEMENTS - COMMUNITY DESIGN

goal:

- The City of Norwalk will be recognized as a place of visual order and exceptional quality in design.

2. Community Design Issues

Good community design applies on the small scale, to the design of a building or a specific site, and can be exploded to apply on the grand scale, to boulevards, neighborhoods, or the entire city. The treatment of contrast is the primary design concern. As it applies to all art forms, whether it is architecture, painting, sculpture, or music, contrast creates focus and, therefore, should be used delicately. Otherwise, the community could evolve into a place of visual disarray. Contrast can be used effectively, however, to create focus on those aspects of the community which should be highlighted, and, when minimized, to create harmony amongst those areas of the community which should share a common link. The following is intended to identify general design issues related to residential, commercial, industrial, and public facility and right-of-way design.

a. Residential Design

Residential uses occupy the greatest proportion of land area in the City and, therefore, have a tremendous effect on the visual character of the community. Furthermore, residents develop their attitudes of the community based, in large part, on what they see and experience within their own general surroundings. Since the City of Norwalk is a "built-out" community, new residential development will take the form of

The City of Norwalk General Plan
CITYWIDE ELEMENTS - COMMUNITY DESIGN

infill construction. Many contextual problems can be created through infill construction, whether the project involves development of new, or rehabilitation of older, single and multiple-family dwelling units. The following issues should be considered:

- Development should reflect the prevailing *architectural style*. In the same sense that a "square box" would not fit into the fabric of a neighborhood with rich architectural details, a heavily articulated building would not fit into the fabric of a modest neighborhood. For this reason, it is important that new development retain some form of compatibility or link to past development. Attributes such as roof lines, building and landscape materials and textures, and colors should be considered.
- New buildings should be similar in *scale and massing* to neighboring development. A grandiose mansion will, despite a similar architectural style, dwarf a smaller, ranch style home and, therefore, may be inappropriate for such a setting. Like architectural style, the size and shape of new development should be visually linked to its surroundings.
- Even if a building is compatible with the dominant architectural style and scale, the *building orientation* can substantially affect the degree of harmony that is established with neighboring

The City of Norwalk General Plan
CITYWIDE ELEMENTS - COMMUNITY DESIGN

development. Excessive variations in building setback, for example, can appear turgid and disorderly. An apartment building in the middle of the block that is situated close to the street will contrast sharply with the spacious front lawns of other single-family homes.

In short, building exteriors and landscape design should be compatible with existing development, reflecting the dominant architectural features of the neighborhood. Though a development does not have to duplicate the surrounding neighborhood, it should include the best and most prominent visual attributes. The introduction of new, highly contrasting elements should be carefully considered, and used only when focus is desired.

b. Commercial Design

Though not constituting the majority of land area, commercial developments, by nature of their needs, tend to occupy the most visible locations within the community, along major boulevards and prominent corners. Thus, they provide a tremendous visual impression on persons shopping or employed within the City, and those passing through. Design issues related to commercial development, including buildings, landscape treatment, and signage, share many of the same issues as residential development, especially as related to *architectural style, scale and massing, and building orientation*. Commercial developments, however, need to be visible and identifiable from the crowd of other businesses. Accordingly, the

The City of Norwalk General Plan
CITYWIDE ELEMENTS - COMMUNITY DESIGN

balance between contrast and compatibility must be carefully evaluated. Some of the issues that are more particular to commercial development are as follows:

- **Neighborhood Commercial** - The Neighborhood Commercial areas are, essentially, components of the residential neighborhood and should, to a certain degree, share and support the design attributes of the adjacent residential area, especially since many neighborhood commercial properties abut residential districts.

- **Professional Office and General Commercial** - As the center of our livelihoods and the marketplace for our purchases and entertainment, the Professional Office and General Commercial land use designations are focal points for the community. To create an active and vibrant commercial environment, a pleasing visual environment must exist. While some commercial areas may be highway oriented, for quick stop and go purchases, other commercial areas may benefit more from the creation of a certain ambience or flavor that stimulates longer shopping sprees. Thus, each site must be carefully evaluated in context with how it will function with neighboring commercial development. If a development lies within an Area Plan or Opportunity and Special Site Study Area, even greater consideration must be

The City of Norwalk General Plan
CITYWIDE ELEMENTS - COMMUNITY DESIGN

given for a project's consistency with an overall design scheme.

c. *Industrial Design*

Industrial developments are usually tucked away from the most visible areas of the City; however, there are a number of industrially designated properties which front major streets. Since most industrial uses include the use of heavy equipment or storage of materials, their placement and obscurement are an integral part of site design. Overall, industrial developments should be equally attentive to *architectural style, scale and massing, and building orientation* as residential and commercial developments.

d. *Public Facility and Right-of-Way Design*

Public facilities, such as parks and civic buildings, are often embedded within a residential, commercial, or industrial area and, thus, should follow the criteria for those respective districts. Together with public right-of-way design, however, the City is provided with an opportunity to visually link the various components of the community. In general, public facility and right-of-way design should also consider *architectural style, scale and massing, and building orientation*. However, some commonality could also be developed to distinguish public improvements. In doing so, the residential neighborhoods, commercial districts, and industrial areas will share a common visual bond, resulting in a cohesive community design. Some possibilities for establishing visual unity within the community

The City of Norwalk General Plan
CITYWIDE ELEMENTS - COMMUNITY DESIGN

are listed below:

- *Landscaping* of public right-of-ways can be used to create a hierarchy of streets and to define neighborhoods and districts. Materials such as street trees, when the same species are used throughout and planted in regular intervals, are an effective way of creating visual order and beauty in the community, while positively contributing to the community's microclimate.
- *Street lights and Traffic Control Devices* can also be selectively used to define a neighborhood or district. Again, consistency with regard to style and placement will communicate a sense of order.
- *Pedestrian Amenities*, such as benches, trash receptacles, bicycle racks, and bollards, should also be selected to represent some sense of order, and should be compatible with other public right-of-way improvements such as street lights and signage. To avoid visual clutter, pedestrian amenities should be clustered together, including newspaper racks and public telephones.
- *Public Signage* should also impart orderliness with uniform size, type style, and graphic symbols.
- *Gateways* into the City, and into

The City of Norwalk General Plan
CITYWIDE ELEMENTS - COMMUNITY DESIGN

neighborhoods and districts, should be designed to signify arrival and portray the unique qualities of that individual place. Portal treatments may include:

- Textured street paving
- Entryway monumentation
- Special landscaping treatments

It is apparent that there are many methods of establishing aesthetic continuity within the City. Conscious design decisions regarding public facilities and right-of-ways will certainly provide visual unity and order within the community. Although not public in nature, this section also applies to railroad right-of-way and other semi-public uses.

3. Community Design Plan

In light of the issues described throughout this Element, the City of Norwalk establishes its concern for the visual environment. The following policies and implementation measures should be implemented to preserve and improve the design of the community:

a. Policies

1. New residential, commercial, industrial, and public facility and right-of-way developments should be reviewed to determine consistency and compatibility with the surrounding neighborhood, district, and the overall community.
2. Rehabilitation of existing residential, commercial, industrial, and public

The City of Norwalk General Plan
CITYWIDE ELEMENTS - COMMUNITY DESIGN

commercial, industrial, and public facility and right-of-way improvements should be reviewed for consistency and compatibility with the surrounding neighborhood, district, and the overall community.

3. Existing residential, commercial, industrial, and public facility and right-of-way improvements should be maintained to support a positive community image.

b. Implementation Measures

1. Property Maintenance and Building Rehabilitation Appeals Board, and the Property Maintenance division will ensure that existing properties are maintained.
2. Capital Improvements, including public right-of-way improvements, will be designed to define neighborhoods, districts, gateways, and a hierarchy of streets.
3. The Design Review Board will determine the compatibility of development with its surroundings.
4. Zoning regulations will be reviewed to determine if appropriate community design is being facilitated.

The City of Norwalk General Plan
CITYWIDE ELEMENTS - COMMUNITY DESIGN

5. Where an area of particular concern exists, design guidelines may be adopted for a district, neighborhood, and/or for application on a Citywide basis.