

4.1 URBAN DESIGN GUIDING FRAMEWORK

At the turn of the 20th Century, urban design and planning generally provided little input on how communities grew other than zoning and building code requirements. Homes were typically built close to the main street business area because it was the social and economic hub. Individuals wanted to be a part of a community. Most settlers at the time were not wealthy enough to commission individually designed homes. Instead they selected from a set of common floor plans and styles that were buildable based on common building materials and local craft skills. This selection process created diversity in the architectural styles present in a neighborhood area. The different styles still had a regular pattern to them: scales were similar in size, setbacks were similar, and building materials were generally consistent, and the level of detailing was similar. The selection of a particular style of architecture expressed the pride and personality of an owner to passersby. This is the legacy of architectural styles in North Park and the community has identified it as one attribute in the foundation for future evolution of the community.

4.1.1 VISION

The vision of the Urban Design Element was formulated during the community outreach process. The vision was put forth by community members, stakeholders, and the North Park Planning Committee and has guided the formation of this Urban Design Element.

“Envision a community that accommodates future growth as well as protects historic neighborhoods and structures. Future growth and infill development should adhere to a high level of construction quality and design integrity. Historic neighborhoods should maintain the spirit and character of the past through retention or adaptive reuse of existing structures and conformance to themes and details already present in the neighborhood. Connecting North Park’s various land uses and landmarks should be a comprehensive, sustainable network of linkages that enhance both the access and appearance of the community”

4.1.2 CORE DESIGN VALUES

Along with the vision, the community identified the following nine core design values that distinguish North Park as a unique community.



A Human Scale – Often coined as a “small town atmosphere”, communities like North Park are best known for providing a consistent built scale, both at the individual building level (lot sizes, heights and massing) and at the block level where buildings and site elements set the scale of neighborhoods. Human scale also relates to detailing on buildings, including the size of panels where materials change, window fenestration, doorway design, offsetting planes, incorporation of art, and other details that emphasize that the building is in scale with a person. This “good neighbor” policy will help to preserve North Park as a “Humanely Scaled” community.



A Sense of Time – People choose to live in North Park partly because of its unique historical background and its diversity in building forms and styles. New projects should respect this legacy and express new interpretation of existing styles, without replicating history where it did not exist.



A Balance of Uniformity and Diversity – Standing in any one location in North Park, one will see different styles, colors, forms and detailing. Though diversity is ever present, the North Park built environment also appears harmonious. New forms, colors, materials and design detailing should strive to be different while at the same time become part of the fabric of the community by including elements found “next door” and not overpowering the character of the neighborhood. Design conformity must recognize individual creativity.



A Celebration of Civic Art and Design – The “humane scale, sense of time and diversity” of North Park are partly due to the expression of “art” found in the community. Art can be expressed in pure forms such as public art, private art viewed by the public and art installations. But art is also present in building facades, window display systems, signage, and other expressions of arts and crafts that are not produced by formal artists. New projects should express art both literally through the use of public art as well as artistic expressions in building and site elements.



A Green North Park – Many have expressed the concern and desire to have North Park be a model of sustainability. This model fits well with the historic character, diversity and civic art focus of the community. Sustainable practices cover community-wide initiatives as well as individual efforts at the parcel level. New projects must help show the rest of the community how architecture, landscape architecture and site planning can all increase sustainable practices and help to “green” North Park.



A Connection to the Outdoors – People need connections to nature. North Park has significant views and open space systems that are often not well connected or visually accessible. All projects need to relate to the adjacent environment, regardless of the presence of open space canyons or not.



A Connection to Others – People need connections to each other. All projects need to relate interior environments to outdoor spaces and the street. A good transition from private to semi-private to semi-public to full public space is essential in providing spaces where people can interact with their neighbors.



A Healthy Community – The pedestrian scale and layout of North Park provides a great opportunity to encourage active transportation (walking and biking) and access to healthy activities (parks, social activities and food). All projects should encourage and accommodate alternative means of access and support transit, walking and biking including on-site features as well as interface with the street environment.



A Safe and Comfortable Community – Proper design can assure a safe environment and safe environments are essential for the other 8 core design values listed above. New projects must take into account the real and perceived safety concerns of community members and create safe environments that encourage eyes on the street by encouraging walking, socializing and passive activities that make up the foundation of a “Community”.

4.1.3 GENERAL OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES

The community outreach process of the North Park Community Plan Update included the refinement of the 1986 Community Plan Urban Design Element’s (UDE) objectives. The original nine objectives expanded to twelve and form the major guidance for this Element. The following policies and guidelines are based on the core values and UDE objectives. These policies seek to protect and enhance the core values identified by the community and public outreach process.

Goal Statement:

“Enhance the quality of life and preserve the community character of Greater North Park, recognizing that there will be changes to the urban form and a need to respond to future urban design issues.”

Objective #1: Ensure that development in the community conforms with the Greater North Park Community Plan Update Urban Design Element.

- Action- 1 Encourage compatible new infill development that recognizes existing context.*
- Action- 2 Design infill development to complement and enhance the character of its surrounding neighborhood, district and/or corridor (patterns), while allowing each new development to retain a distinct visual identity (architecture).*
- Action- 3 Design infill development to respect the pattern of buildings and open spaces on adjacent sites and provide opportunities for enhanced mobility connections, sustainability techniques, and aesthetic views.*
- Action- 4 Design infill development to respect neighboring building’s fronts, backs sides, scale and intensity in order to respectfully and seamlessly transition between existing neighborhoods and redeveloped corridors.*

Objective #2: Preserve the architectural variety and residential character of Greater North Park.

- Action- 5 Retrofit commercial corridors that are currently suburban strip centers into mixed-use transit villages and neighborhood centers.*
- Action- 6 Enhance and focus new development on primary corridors evenly spaced on half-mile increments throughout the community.*
- Action- 7 Boulevards connect neighborhoods and districts and range from boulevards to transit lines to avenues to neighborhood streets to alleys to canyons and parkways.*

Objective #3: Maintain, expand, and increase existing open space edges of the community and create a sense of arrival including better signage at major community gateways.

- Action- 8* *Development should be held back from canyon edges so that public access can be made to the canyon overlooks and access to canyon trails.*
- Action- 9* *Public views need to be preserved and new development shall not block existing views.*
- Action- 10* *Identify key building focal point sites (terminated vista) for iconic architecture and building towards a contemporary cultural expression.*

Objective #4: Develop a varied urban character within the community.

- Action- 11* *Provide pedestrian and bicycle facilities and amenities.*
- Action- 12* *Create and maintain a continuous, convenient network of pedestrian and bicycle facilities throughout the community to reduce dependence upon the automobile to access every daily need.*
- Action- 13* *Provide pedestrian and bicycle amenities, including street furniture, landscaping, lighting, shelters, way-finding devices, signage, and trash receptacles, to make walking more attractive and convenient.*
- Action- 14* *Link a network of shared mobility facilities, such as cars, bicycles, pedestrian and transit, to increase the convenient of travel options.*
- Action- 15* *Identify primary transit station areas as Specific Planning Areas (SPAs).*
- Action- 16* *Focus future mixed-use growth areas along existing corridors and specifically plan mixed-use transit villages and neighborhood centers.*

Objective #5: Ensure that new buildings respect and complement the character and scale of neighboring buildings.

- Action- 17* *Allow Infill development that is compatible with a neighborhood’s distinctive character and vitality.*
- Action- 18* *Maintain walkable neighborhoods as the basic building block of all neighborhoods.*
- Action- 19* *Encourage innovative housing design to meet citywide population needs while contributing to the preservation or creation of character and vitality.*

Objective #6: Maximize the aesthetic quality, functionality, and sustainability of the public right of way through the design of the built environment, public improvements, landscaping, and public art.

- Action- 20* *Provide a functional relationship between pedestrians and a building’s street edge.*
- Action- 21* *Encourage human-scaled activity on the street through building design. Frequent entrances and windows at pedestrian height, with outdoor civic spaces create a lively, pedestrian-friendly character along public streets.*

Action- 22 Create visually unified street spaces by designing the orientation of new buildings and building setbacks to define the character of the place. Buildings with frontages set closer to the street are more urban than buildings set farther back from the street, which are less urban.

Objective #7: Preserve existing street trees and increase the quality of landscaping in public right of way and front yard areas utilizing sustainable practices, so that it contributes to community character.

Action- 23 Enhance parkways and reclaim streets to encourage other modes of transportation whenever possible.

Action- 24 Follow the guidelines set by the Street Tree Master Plan.

Objective #8: Eliminate visual clutter, including nonconforming signs and overhead utility lines, and billboards and utility boxes located in front yards, parkways, and sidewalks.

Action- 25 Public Art and Cultural Amenity installations shall be designed as works on permanent or temporary display with extensive communication about art to those experiencing the installation.

Action- 26 Continue to cultivate North Park’s cultural significance as the birthplace our San Diego’s Craft Beer, Slow Food and Bicycle ethos.

Objective #9: Preserve and restore unique architecturally significant structures within the community and encourage adaptive reuse.

Action- 27 Encourage adaptive reuse of existing structures.

Objective #10: Maintain and protect the visual interface between Balboa Park and the community.

Action- 28 Public views need to be preserved, and private views should be considered when determining tree selections.

Action- 29 Where private land is located near open space or public parks and plazas, provide buffers (roadways, plantings, walls, fencing) in order to limit edge affects and disturbances.

Action- 30 Incorporate natural features and landscaped spaces into developments to provide a sense of openness, continuity and enhance the existing grid street patterns.

Objective #11: Create neighborhoods identity through enhancing public space and culture.

Action- 31 Identify and enhance special districts such as entertainment, art, business, civic, theater, and thematic districts.

Action- 32 Identify employment district opportunities along transit corridors for large-scale workplaces, shopping, and entertainment districts.

Action- 33 Apply urban design measures on commercial/entertainment uses to maximize distinguishing cultural and characteristics.

Objective #12: Utilize Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) guidelines and promote the ongoing involvement of the Police Department in the development process to reduce crime in the community.

Action- 34 Design public spaces so it is inviting and safe for pedestrian and bicycle traffic.

Action- 35 Civic Architecture should be carefully located at key Focal Points (terminated vistas) in relationship the visual composition of building and street vista termination.



Action- 36 Provide places, spaces, carefully planned details, and genuine building materials to craft valuable and beautiful experiences for people walking through new developments, public streets and civic spaces.

Action- 37 Design for delight, humor and surprise in public or shared spaces by providing experiences that appeal to our tactile senses of touch, sound or visual qualities.

Action- 38 Carefully and/or purposely locate the public spaces to ensure shorter distances between them and a critical mass of people and events.