City of San Mateo

Small Lot Multi Family

(less than 10,000 square foot lot area)

Design Guidelines

March, 1992

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Contents

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Introduction

Where Applicable

All multi family zoned parcels which are less than 10,000 square feet in size and proposed to be developed with three or more total dwelling units, shall conform with the following design guidelines as adopted per Resolution No. 21 (1992).

Purpose

Small lot multi family parcels are defined as property in a multi family residential zone or any property being developed with only a multi family use, ranging in size from 7,500 up to 10,000 square feet. Common dimensions of these lots in San Mateo are 50 to 60 feet in width and 150 feet or more in depth.

Concern for the visual quality of multi family neighborhoods was expressed during the General Plan process that concluded in July1990. Issues of the appropriateness and compatibility of small lot multi family development were identified and included in past years, objections have been raised over projects that have detracted from existing neighborhoods.

San Mateo's multi family neighborhoods are composed of a variety of building types and sizes. Some neighborhoods are developed with most buildings of a similar size and style while other neighborhoods have large multi-unit buildings next to single-family residences. Buildings in the most attractive neighborhoods have certain elements in common that contribute to the visual and functional well being of the area. These guidelines identify those features and illustrate how they can be applied to new development.

Relationship to the Zoning Code

The Zoning Code addresses development controls regarding height, bulk, setbacks, parking, landscaping, and various other controls. The design guidelines are in addition to all Zoning Code requirements. The design guidelines are intended to compliment the Zoning Code to ensure that quality developments are built.

Zoning Code Overview

The following is a <u>partial</u> summary of zoning code development standards in the R-3, R-4 and R-5 zones. For a complete list of requirements for multi-family development, consult the Zoning Code.

<u>Densities.</u> Densities are permitted in the multi family zones based on lot size and width as follows:

Minimum Parcel Area (sq. ft.)	Minimum Parcel Width (lineal ft.)	Minimum Parcel Area/D.U. (sq. ft.)	Units Permitted
5,000	50	2,500	2
8,000	65	2,000	4
10,000	80	1,500 (R-3	6
		1,000 (R-4, R-5)	10

Floor Area Ratio: Maximum permitted floor area ratios are 0.85 in R-3 zones, 1.5 in R-4 zones, and 2.0 in R-5 zones. Additional floor area may be granted in R-3 and R-4 zones for the area provided to cover parking spaces and turnaround areas not otherwise required to be covered by the code.

Yard Areas: Front and rear yard setbacks are 15 feet for buildings three stories or less. Side setbacks shall be 6 feet for buildings two stories or less and 8½ feet for the street side of corner parcels. For buildings greater than two stories, the setback is ½ the building height.

Open Space: Open space is required in R-3 zones at a rate per dwelling unit of 200 square feet for the first bedroom, and another 100 square feet for each additional bedroom. R-4 and R-5 zones do not have a specific open space requirement.

Parking: Parking is required at a rate of 1.8 spaces for a one-bedroom unit, 2.0 spaces for a two-bedroom unit, and 2.2 spaces for three or more bedrooms or any unit larger than 1400 square feet.

Project Evaluation

Proposed small lot multi family developments shall be reviewed for compliance with the Zoning Code and design guidelines. When unusual characteristics of the project site such as unique scale of development in the surrounding area; existing trees; or a unique existing development pattern, make the use of the guidelines inappropriate, the approving body may approve projects not in compliance with the guidelines, determining that other solutions to design issues addressed in the guidelines may be preferable.

Format of the Guidelines

The design guidelines are divided into five sections, each identifying goals and specific design objectives that may be used to accomplish these goals. Background information and illustrations are provided to explain issues and goals. The drawings are intended to illustrate problems and solutions; they are not design examples to be copied.

The guidelines represent minimum criteria for acceptable development. Other design problems specific to a site may also need to be addressed.

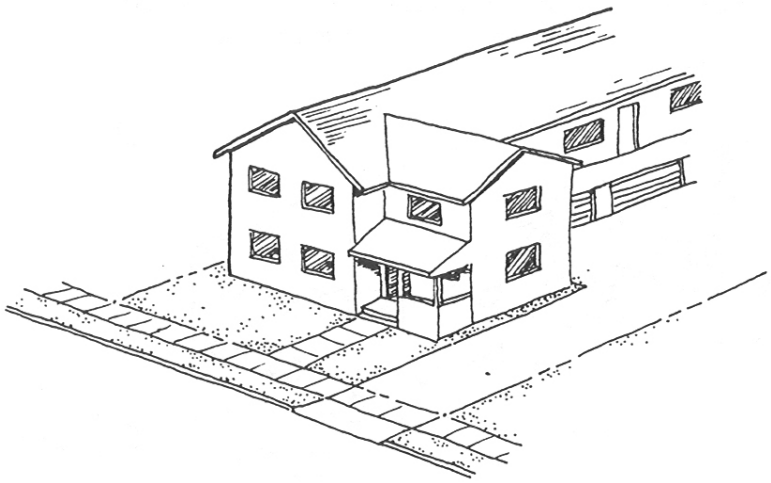
Goal 1: Establish a residential front door appearance to buildings.

Most neighborhoods in San Mateo are composed of buildings that have front doors and living room windows facing the street. Parking is generally located in a garage to the side or at the rear of the property where it does not dominate the view from the street. This development pattern of having large windows and entries visible from the street is a significant characteristic of San Mateo's neighborhoods and should be retained. When these features are present, the residential use of the property becomes obvious and the new building will better fit the character of the area. Also, windows facing the street allow residents to easily monitor the street for security purposes.

Design Objectives:

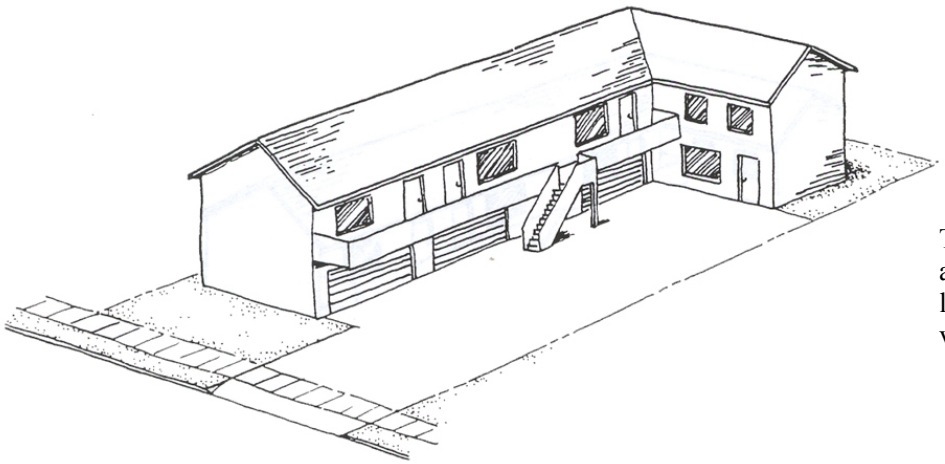
- Locate living areas and front doors on the ground floor facing the street.
- Screen the parking area by locating a wider portion of the building towards the street, with a narrower (12' width) driveway leading to parking at the rear of the property.

DO



Building that has its wider portion with living areas and front door facing the street. Parking is screened from view and accessed by a 12' driveway.

AVOID



The blank building front does not announce a residential use, and the large paved area dominates the view of the property.

Goal 2: Reduce the apparent amount of paved area used only for auto circulation.

In order to accommodate an auto back-up and turn-around area, 24 feet is required behind parking spaces. To make the paved area appear smaller, portions of the pavement area not necessary for circulation should be landscaped. When these small, unused areas are landscaped, they can significantly break up the appearance of the paved area.

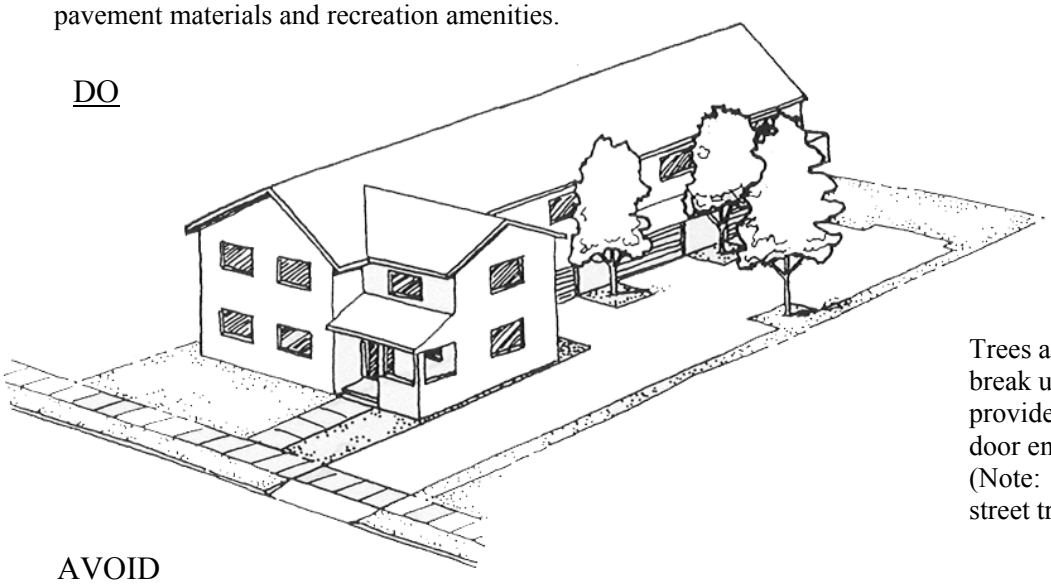
Most of the dwelling units have front doors entering from the auto back-up area. The use of plants and special paving materials can help transform a bleak auto back-up space into a more desirable front door entry area. The auto circulation area may also be used as recreation space. The site design should consider recreation and play opportunities as well as site distances for safety purposes.

Design Objective:

- Locate landscaping in unused portions of the auto back-up area. Landscaped areas should be large enough to accommodate trees (5' x 5' min) wherever possible.

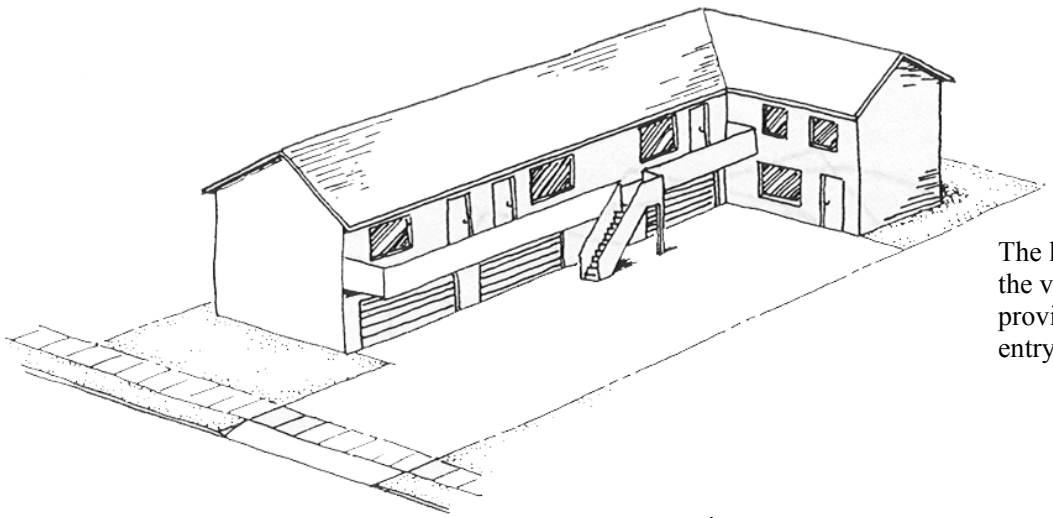
- Design auto circulation areas to be multiple use areas, accomplished by landscaping, special pavement materials and recreation amenities.

DO



Trees and landscaping visually break up the paved area and provide a more desirable front door entry to the rear units. (Note: City code also requires street trees.)

AVOID



The large paved area dominates the view of the property and provides an unfriendly, auto-only entry.

Goal 3: Articulate building walls and roofs to provide a sense of scale.

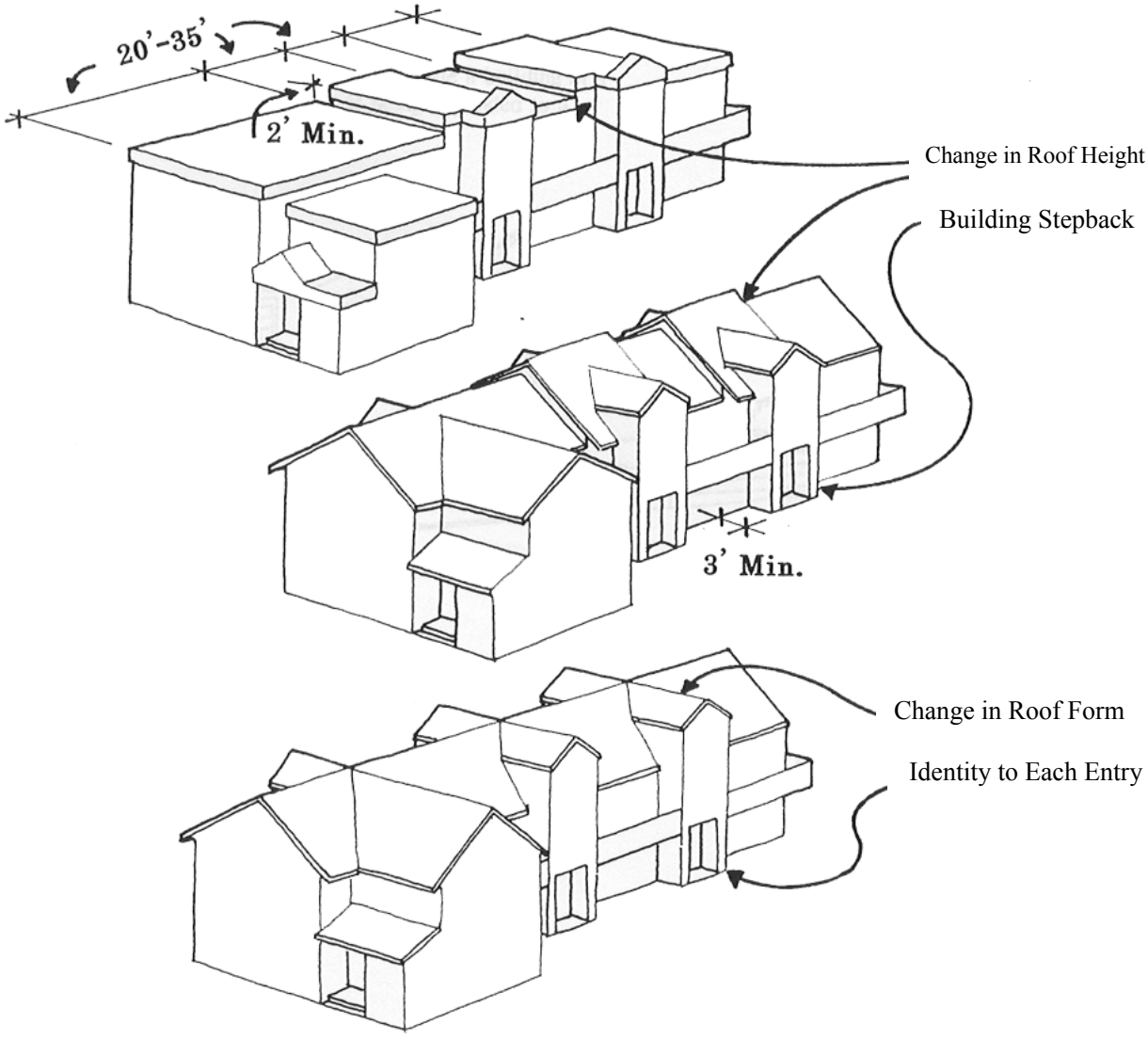
Most residential neighborhoods in San Mateo were developed on lots of 50 to 60 feet of width. The size of the lot has determined the scale of the building by limiting its width. Building features such as bay windows, entries and chimneys are also used to visually divide a building into smaller sections. Buildings can also achieve the architectural proportions common to San Mateo's neighborhoods by dividing the building walls and roofs into smaller sections.

Design Objectives:

- Visually divide the building into smaller sections by providing a 3-foot stepback in building walls at intervals of 20 to 35 feet on all sides of the building.

- Provide a 2-foot step in roof height or a change in roof form at intervals of 20 to 35 feet.

- Dwelling units should have some individual identity within the project. This may be provided by distinctive entries, a break in the building form or use of materials.



Goal 4: Acknowledge the building form and character of the neighborhood.

Some neighborhoods in San Mateo are made up of buildings that have similar forms, proportions or architectural styles. Other neighborhoods have a greater mix of building types. Neighborhoods that have a similar urban form or style can be identified by characteristics such as similar height (e.g., one or two stories), common roof slope, similar window shape, common exterior materials, or common architectural detailing.

In areas where a similar urban form has been established and retained, new development should respect the developed form. The characteristics that have established the form of the neighborhood must be identified and should be incorporated into the design of the project. The intent is not to mimic the architecture of any area but to reflect the common features that characterize the area.

Design Objective:

- Identify architectural forms, patterns and features that establish the character of the area and incorporate those into the project design.

The following three sketches illustrate a building in an existing neighborhood that is being expanded to a multi-family use.

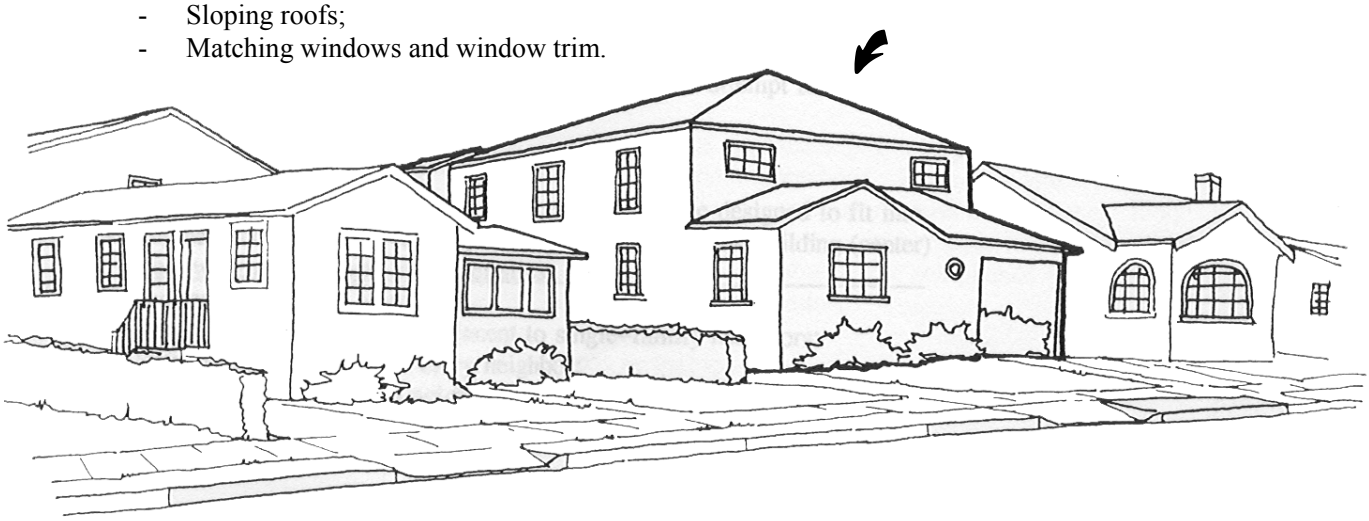
Architectural characteristics of the existing neighborhood include:

- One story buildings at the street;
- Sloping roofs;
- Recessed entries
- Trim around windows;
- Divided panes in the windows;
- Parking concealed from the street.

Acknowledge the building form and character of the neighborhood. (Continued)

Conversion of a house to a multi-family building that successfully acknowledges neighborhood characteristics. Modifications include:

- Maintains one-story building at the street;
- Sloping roofs;
- Matching windows and window trim.



Conversion of a house to a multi-family building that ignores neighborhood characteristics. Modification has the following mistakes:

- Large, blocky building form;
- Flat roof that does not match the neighborhood;
- Windows that do not match existing.

Acknowledge the building form and character of the neighborhood. (Continued)

In neighborhoods where there is no common visual form, a greater flexibility in design exists for new buildings, and a greater opportunity to help define the area. The architectural solution should then attempt to unify the character of the neighborhood.

Design Objective:

- In neighborhoods where a defined architectural pattern does not exist, the design should draw upon the positive design features of the area in an attempt to unify it.

The following sketch illustrates how a new building may be designed to fit into an existing neighborhood with varying building types. The new building (center) has the following architectural characteristics:

- Sloped, one-story roof at entry;
- One-story portion of building adjacent to single-family neighbors;
- Taller wall adjacent to three-story neighbor;
- Stucco finish similar to both neighbors; and
- Concealed parking.

Goal 5: Provide usable open space.

The zoning code requires that open space be provided in R-3 zones at a rate per dwelling unit of 200 square feet for the first bedroom and another 100 square feet for each additional bedroom. A specified square footage of open space is not required in R-4 and R-5 zones. However, all developments should include open space that is usable by the residents and is visually pleasing.

Where open space is required by the zoning code, it can be provided in the setback areas, on balconies and in other non-auto areas. Required open space must have a minimum horizontal dimension of 10 feet if it is located on the ground and 6 feet if it is located on a balcony.

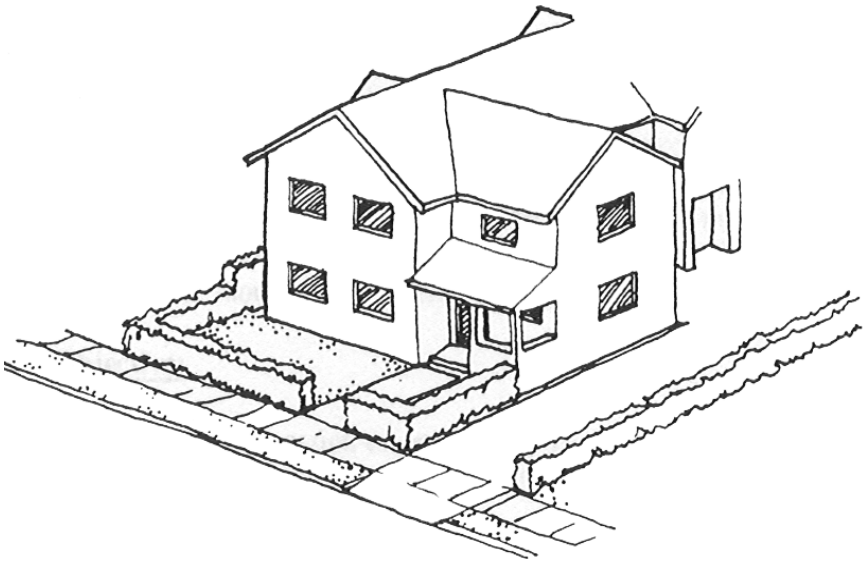
Open space should be developed as a mixture of walkable and landscaped areas in order to be usable to residents and aesthetically contribute to the character of the neighborhood. When open space or setbacks are completely landscaped with groundcover or shrubs, few recreational opportunities are available. If the open space is all paved, it will lack the landscaping common to San Mateo neighborhoods that softens the appearance of buildings. For these reason the open space should be a mix of walkable and planted areas that are aesthetically arranged and can be used for passive or active recreation.

The front yard setback, if developed properly, can be usable open space in areas where traffic is light. A 3-foot height fence or hedge located at the front property line provides an acceptable level of privacy without "walling" off the street. A 3-foot fence is low enough to allow surveillance of the street from within the home, which is important for maintaining safe neighborhoods. A fence or hedge at the front property line may not be appropriate in neighborhoods where front yards have an "open" character.

Design Objective:

- Open space areas shall be developed as a mixture of walkable and planted areas. Walkable areas may be decks, patios, lawn or other similar surface.

- In neighborhoods where hedges or low fencing are common in the front yards, a 3-foot height fence or hedge may be used to define front yard open space.



Three foot height hedge enclosing frontyard.

Provide usable open space. (Continued)

Because the auto back-up and circulation areas generally occupy a large percentage of the site, these areas should also be designed as usable open space where practical. These areas may serve as entry courts to dwelling units, play areas for children and sitting spaces. Care should be taken to design these areas so they may be used not only as required for auto circulation but also as safe and functional open space. Landscaping and special paving materials should be used to accomplish this.

Design Objective:

- Design auto circulation areas to also function as usable open space, accomplished by placement of landscaping, use of special pavement materials and recreation amenities.

Special paving and landscaping are used to reduce the paved area adjacent to the side of the building and provide a pleasant entry to the rear units.

The design of open space areas should consider the effects of sun, wind, and noise. Usable open space should be provided with both sun and shade areas whenever possible, be shielded from strong winds, and be located way from heavy traffic areas. Patios should be located away from the edge of the north side of buildings to avoid total shading and be provided with shade trees when located adjacent to a south wall. Landscaping and fences can also be used to buffer wind and noise. In order to be properly located, the comfort of open space areas should be considered during the initial site layout.

Design Objective:

- The design and location of open space areas should always consider the effects of sun, wind, and noise in order to create comfortable and usable open space areas.