



CITY OF CARMEL-BY-THE-SEA

Design Traditions 1.5 Update and Receive Feedback

Planning Commission

November 18, 2025



Today's Meeting

- Asked by City Council for update on project
- PC = One of main technical users
 - Ensure usability - form, and function
- Refresher on background and update on project status
- Receive current draft from Steering Committee efforts
 - Includes recommended supporting document “package”
- PC provides feedback to staff and Steering Committee
- Bring feedback to City Council in December



Project Background

- March, 2022 – Nore Winter contract
 - Design Traditions 1.5 Project (DT-1.5)
- April, 2022 – DT-1.5 Steering Committee appointed by Council
 - First meeting, April 13th
 - 36 meetings in total since then (10 mo. gap – Planning Director)
- June, 2022 – Community workshops #1 and #2
 - 2 nights, 50-75 people
- September, 2022 – Strategy Paper
 - Consolidated workshop findings
 - Approved by PC and Council



Project Background (cont.)

- October, 2022 – Community workshop #3
 - Shared strategy paper and received feedback
- October, 2022 to February, 2023 – Drafting Design Guidelines 1.5
 - Led by Nore Winter
 - Steering Committee and staff continue to meet with consultant
- February, 2023 – Consultant draft released for public review
 - Steering Committee concerns
 - Not streamlined
 - More complicated
 - Longer



Project Background (cont.)

- March, 2023 – Steering Committee revised draft
 - Organized by “Core Principles”
 - More user friendly
 - Less redundancy
 - Reduced page count
- March 2023 to Present – Refine Steering Committee draft
 - Public meetings and input
 - Refined language
 - Small guideline additions
 - Photographs
 - Supporting documents



Current Draft Guidelines Overview

- Built a design guideline “package”
 - Introduction
 - Residential Guidelines
 - Commercial Guidelines
 - Municipal Guidelines (recommended)
 - Appendices (support documents)
 - Historical Context
 - Project Review: Process, Checklists & Narratives
 - Preferred Planting and Building Materials
 - Further Illustrations
 - Index



Current Draft Guidelines Highlights

- Organized under 6 “Core Principles”
 - Developed through community workshops
- Reduced Page Count
 - 32 pages vs. 180 pages
- Reduced photographs (in process)
 - Only when guidelines need a visual
- Find specific topics via index (e.g.: “windows”)
 - Shows up under multiple Core Principles
- Hyperlinks (in process)
- Revised and reduced supporting sections (in process)
 - “About”, “How to Use”, “Formatting”, “Defining Features, etc.

CORE PRINCIPLES

1. ENHANCE, restore, and preserve the forest in all improvement projects: private, public, and otherwise.
2. SUBORDINATE every built structure to the character and continuity of the forest, natural environment, and to the natural features of its own site.
3. FIT every built structure within its neighborhood context.
4. RETAIN and build upon Carmel's architectural heritage.
5. DESIGN every built structure with modesty and restraint.
6. DETAIL every property authentically and consistently.



Design Guidelines Progression

• Carmel-by-the-Sea Downtown Design Guidelines •

Working with Topography

Maintaining natural slopes in downtown is encouraged, especially along edges abutting single family neighborhoods. The manner in which a site is excavated for a building foundation and the way in which grades are treated therefore important considerations.

1.1. Minimize the extent of excavation and fill on a site.

- Site design should follow the natural contours of the site. Where construction on a steep slope is necessary, step the foundation and building forms to follow the contours.

1.2. Minimize the visual impacts of retaining walls, garden walls and other foundation structures as seen from the public way.

- Use a stepped building foundation that follows site contours.
- Avoid a design that requires a tall retaining wall, terracing or revetments that will be visible from the public way when feasible.
- An exception is for underground parking structures.



Use a stepped building foundation that follows site contours.

Related guiding principles

(See p.xx):

- #1. Restore and enhance the forest...
- #2. Subordinate structures to the forest...
- #3. Keep structures modest...



Avoid abrupt changes in grade on the site and between adjoining properties.

Consultant Draft

- 1.1. Preserve all existing healthy upper canopy and lower canopy trees (for example, as shown by rooflines within un-cut branches above).
- 1.1.1. Before beginning design work, have a licensed surveyor or engineer prepare the required survey, showing existing site conditions, topography, drainage features, trees, structures, right-of-way edges and character, views, privacy issues, historical evaluations, nonconformities, neighborhood design contexts, and other features useful in designing a project.
- 1.1.2. Address comments provided by a City Planner and the City Forester on the required survey and on the required City Forester evaluation of existing tree significance and condition on and immediately adjacent to the project site, including in the right-of-way.
- 1.1.3. Address the Forest and Beach Commission's project review comments on the effects that proposed work will have on significant trees.
- 1.1.4. Consult the "Preliminary Site Assessment" tree survey when designing and locating new structures and additions to determine which trees are significant and should be protected.
- 1.1.5. Provide enough open space on each building site to both preserve and add upper and lower canopy trees at sufficient spacings for growth to maturity (as shown by altered floorplan in right-hand diagram above).
- 1.1.6. Locate new construction in accordance with the Land Use Code to minimize impacts on established trees and avoid pruning of limbs and canopies. Set foundations for buildings and walls back far enough from the base of any tree to adequately protect its roots. Plan curb cuts, paving and drainage systems to maintain air transport and water percolation to root systems.
- 1.1.7. Protect existing vegetation during construction in order to screen buildings, contribute to the forest character of the street, and achieve a settled, mature look upon project completion.
- 1.1.8. Plan access and site development to protect trees during construction as provided in the Land Use Code. Do not alter the grade level near nor excavate into the root zone or drip-line of any healthy mature tree, whether on or adjacent to the site, including on abutting properties and in the right-of-way.

image(s) tbd.

Committee Draft

ENHANCE SUBORDINATE FIT RETAIN DESIGN



Feedback Needed

- First look for full Planning Commission of revised format
- Specific feedback requested
 - Functionality/usability – how will it work for you?
 - Form – how does it look and flow?
 - Other design topics – what is missing?
 - Supporting Documents – any modifications or additional docs needed?
- Other feedback welcomed



Thank You!

- Steering Committee
- Community
- Winter & Co.
- Planning Staff
- City Council
- Planning Commission



Next Steps

- City Council – Dec 2nd Meeting
 - Share PC feedback
 - Receive Council feedback
- Complete drafting
 - Reignite project focus
 - Incorporate PC and Council feedback into Guidelines
 - Update Municipal Code as needed
- Begin adoption process
 - PC
 - Council
 - Coastal Commission



Questions?