

# PREPARED BY THE DESIGN REVIEW COMMITTEE OF THE DOLORES HEIGHTS IMPROVEMENT CLUB

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# **DHIC**

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# **DOLORES HEIGHTS IMPROVEMENT CLUB**

April 28, 1998

Ms. Lois Scott, Team Leader Southwest Neighborhood Planning Team San Francisco Planning Department 1660 Mission Street San Francisco, California 94103

Dear Ms. Scott:

Thank you again for inviting the DHIC Design Review Committee to attend the May 5<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Southwest Neighborhood Planning Team. Our committee members are looking forward to meeting the planners who work in our neighborhood and to introducing them to the Dolores Heights Residential Design Guidelines. I am enclosing a copy of the Guidelines for your review, as well as some background information on DHIC, our Design Review Committee, and the creation of the Dolores Heights Special Use District. Please feel free to call me if you have any questions or would like more information.

Sincerely,

Amy Powell, President

Dolores Heights Improvement Club

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# Dolores Heights Improvement Club

The Dolores Heights Improvement Club was founded in 1949 for the purpose of "involvement of the people of Dolores Heights in the condition of the neighborhood." Over the past fifty years, the Club has worked toward the protection and improvement of Dolores Park, community participation in zoning and development decisions, procuring underground utility service, improving neighborhood security, and beautification and landscaping of common public areas.

# **Dolores Heights Special Use District**

In 1978, prompted by concerns over a zoning change that reduced minimum rear yards from 45% to 25%, the DHIC applied to the Board of Supervisors for zoning protection as a special use district. In September 1978, the Board of Supervisors requested City Planning to prepare criteria for a new Dolores Heights Special Use District. Neighbors worked with the City to draft an amendment to the Planning Code, map the area, and survey all of the residents within the proposed district. In January 1980, the Planning Commission recommended adoption of the Dolores Heights Special Use District with provisions for minimum 45% rear yards and 35' maximum building heights. A month later, the Board of Supervisors passed the new district into law.

## **DHIC Design Review Committee**

While the Planning Department was reviewing the proposed Dolores Heights Special Use District in 1978, the DHIC formed the Design Review Committee to evaluate new construction and exterior alteration projects within the neighborhood. That same year, the Planning Commission passed a resolution that recognized the DHIC as being representative of the residents of Dolores Heights and established a policy of giving notice of new permit applications to the DHIC and allowing for consideration of neighborhood concerns early in the Department's permit review process.

When the DHIC is notified of a proposed construction project, the Design Review Committee meets, often with the project sponsor and/or interested neighbors. The Committee reviews the plans for conformity with the Special Use District and neighborhood character, identifies concerns of neighboring residents, and, if appropriate, suggests possible design modifications. If issues remain unresolved after their review of the project, the Committee will make a recommendation or report to the DHIC Board of Directors. The Board will meet (if necessary with the project sponsor, other interested parties and the Committee) to discuss the project and encourage clarification and resolution of disputed issues. The Board of Directors must pass a resolution before the Club can take a position either in support of or opposition to a disputed project.

One of the primary goals of the DHIC's design review process is to identify and attempt to moderate inappropriate or objectionable construction proposals as early as possible in the planning process. Toward that goal, the Dolores Heights Residential Design Guidelines have been developed to provide comprehensive and easily accessible information about DHIC's design objectives.

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## INTRODUCTION

### **Dolores Heights**

Dolores Heights is a uniquely San Franciscan neighborhood. The interplay of buildings, landscape and frequent scenic views creates a soothing yet dynamic urban atmosphere. Historically, the area's steep topography has prevailed upon buildings and streets to conform to its irregular pattern leaving interesting houses and cottages set into the hillside's gardens and tree-filled open spaces.

Changing physical, economic and social influences throughout the history of Dolores Heights have left an intriguing and eclectic mix of building types and styles. Pre-1900 development was limited to a few scattered farms and homes. Building was minimal during the early Victorian period because the steep hillsides made transportation difficult. Many homes in the neighborhood were built just after the turn of the century when development consisted of cottages (including earthquake refugee cottages relocated from Dolores Park) and modest row houses. Later, as appreciation of the natural setting and panoramic views emerged, several substantial homes appeared, mostly on large lots with extensive gardens. The neighborhood's dwellings come in an array of Victorian, Craftsman, Edwardian, Tudor, Art Deco and contemporary styles. Despite the variety of building types; the human scale, scenic views, and many natural areas, give the neighborhood a distinctive and exceptional character.

#### Intent

In 1980 when neighborhood residents created the Dolores Heights Special Use District, the San Francisco Planning Code was amended: "In order to preserve and provide for an established area with a unique character and balance of built and natural environment, with public and private view corridors and panoramas, to conserve existing buildings, plant materials and planted spaces, to prevent unreasonable obstruction of view and light by buildings or plant materials, and to encourage development in context and scale with established character and landscape." (Planning Code Section 241. Dolores Heights Special Use District)

These guidelines are intended to help designers, residents and planners to interpret the provisions of the Special Use District, to recognize what is unique about Dolores Heights, and to consider what is particularly important to planning compatible future development. Our goal is to promote thoughtful, inclusive development which is based not only on code calculations and short-term economic trends, but also on neighborhood context, actual need, and long-term social, economic and environmental factors.

#### Application

These guidelines were developed specifically for application to single family residences located within in Dolores Heights Special Use District. They are intended to be used together with the Planning Code, the General Plan, and the citywide Residential Design Guidelines to review neighborhood compatibility of building proposals.

Throughout the neighborhood there are lawfully existing buildings that do not conform to all of the particulars set forth in these guidelines. The guidelines are intended to apply only when new construction or alterations to existing buildings are proposed. They are not intended as a measure or critique of existing buildings.

#### SITING

The position of a building on its lot is a basic design decision that that plays a crucial role in maintaining a balance of built and natural environment. Appropriate siting of houses along the block-face will preserve and create uniform open spaces for planting, view corridors and sunlight.

## Front yard setbacks

The majority of homes in Dolores Heights have a generous amount of open space between the public sidewalk and the front of the building. The city's master plan describes the neighborhood's "building setbacks with gardens" as an "outstanding and unique" special characteristic. Front yards give street areas a sense of being open, light and pedestrian-friendly. They create a buffer between public and private areas, allow for increased planted space, and help to convey a sense of the neighborhood's natural topography.

# Guideline1: Match existing buildings.

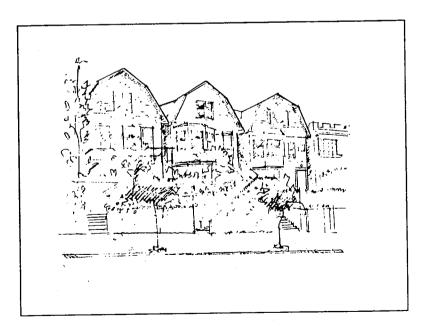
Front building setbacks should match or average the existing front setbacks of adjacent buildings. If the majority of buildings on the block-face establish a pattern of front setbacks, that pattern should generally be respected. Any existing buildings that fail to conform to an established pattern of front setbacks on the block-face should *not* be used as a guide for future development of nearby properties.

# Guideline 2: Avoid obstruction of front setback area.

•A fence enclosing a front yard setback area should be no more than three feet in height above grade. Fences, fence tops and gates taller than three feet in height must be at least 75 percent open to perpendicular view.
•A garage obstruction of a front setback area should be allowed only if it would not exceed the average height and average extension into the front setback area of garages, buildings or retaining walls existing on the adjacent lots. If no such structures exist on adjacent lots, a garage obstruction would not be appropriate.

# Guideline 3: Planted space.

At least 50 percent of the front setback area should be non-continuous paving, landscaped or planted space.



Houses with front setbacks and side spacing

#### Side yards

Side yards are common, although not prevalent, in Dolores Heights. However, inclusion of side yards and side spacing in future development is strongly recommended because they tend to reduce the appearance of bulk in new construction and help to integrate it with the smaller scale buildings that are typical throughout the neighborhood. Side yards also increase the opportunity for landscaping, architectural articulation, and light to buildings, yards and street areas.

#### Guideline 1: Side spacing.

A building should have one or more areas of open space along its sides. These areas can be designed as full or partial side yards, building recesses or notches, light wells, or upper story setbacks. The size of the area depends on the size of the building, larger buildings should have larger areas of side spacing.

#### Guideline 2: Priority locations for side spacing.

The following factors should be given priority in designing and locating side yards and side spacing:

- •prevent blockage of views, light or air to neighboring properties;
- preserve privacy of neighboring properties;
- •match existing pattern of side spacing on nearby buildings.

#### Rear Yards

Uniform rear yards assure the continuation of light and air to established interior block open spaces. Generous rear yards are essential to support the trees and abundant landscaping that make the neighborhood unique.

•The minimum rear yard depth shall be equal to 45 percent of the total depth of the lot on which building is situated, but in no case shall the rear yard be less than 25 feet deep. Planning Code Section 241(a), Dolores Heights Special Use District

#### Guideline 1: Variances.

No variance should permit any part of a building to be built within 25 feet of the rear property line.





Houses with no front setbacks or side spacing

# **BUILDING BULK AND MASSING**

Bulk is the apparent size and massiveness of a building in relationship to its surroundings. New construction is almost always larger than historical, and so requires careful design to achieve an appearance that does not overwhelm nearby building forms. The presence of many older homes and small scale cottages contribute to the neighborhood's human scale, sense of continuity with the past, and balance of natural and built spaces. Existing older homes should be conserved whenever possible, and new development should complement the size and texture of the established neighborhood.

## Height

•No portion of a building shall exceed a height of 35 feet above the existing grade of the lot, with the intent that the building shall be contained within an envelope that slopes upward or downward with the slope of the property. (Planning Code section 241(b), Dolores Heights Special Use District)

## Guideline 1: Building on upsloping lots.

Where a lot slopes uphill away from the front property line, the building should step up the hill in increments following the slope of the hill. No part of the building in the rearmost 16 feet of the lot's buildable area should exceed 25' in height.

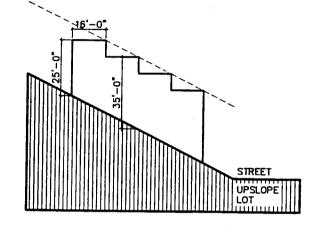
# Guideline 2: Building on downsloping lots.

Where a lot slopes downhill away from the front property line, the building should step down the hill in increments following the slope of the hill.

# Guideline 3: Roof appurtenances.

Mechanical equipment, stair enclosures, antennae and other roof appurtenances should only be exempt from the

height limit if they would not be visible from the street and would not adversely impact neighboring properties.







### Roof Design

Guideline 1: Rooflines should correspond to the slope of the street.

On sloping blocks, buildings and rooflines should reflect the topography of the street and the block-face. The roofline on a downhill lot should not appear higher than the rooflines uphill from it.

Guideline 2: Give preference to pitched roof forms.

Although there are examples of many different styles of roofs in Dolores Heights, pitched roofs are preferred for new construction because they tend to reduce the appearance of bulk, better accommodate preservation of light and views to nearby properties, and have a more interesting appearance when viewed from above. A minimum slope of 6:12 is recommended for the primary roof.

#### Scale and Size

Guideline1: Respect the dimensions of neighboring buildings and lots.

The volume and mass of a new building or addition to an existing one should be compatible with that of surrounding buildings. Because the Planning Code uses lot dimensions to establish the allowable dimensions for buildings, any subdivision, adjustment or merging of lots should result in new lots that are: 1) the same depth as the majority of lots on the block, and, 2) of a complementary width to other lots on the block-face.

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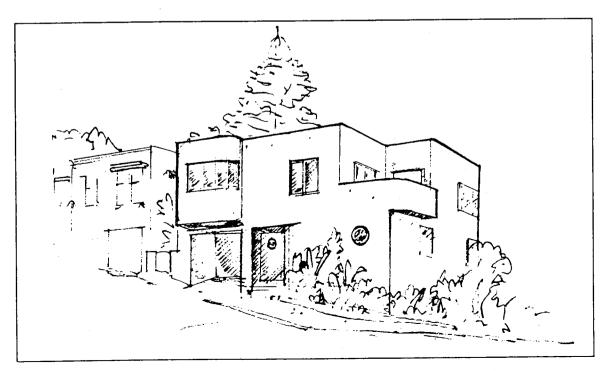
Guideline 2: Size of living area.

•The floor area of a new or enlarged building on a 25 foot wide lot should not exceed 100% of the area of its lot (one square foot of interior living area for each square foot of lot area).

Example: The majority of lots in Dolores Heights are 25 feet wide and 114 feet deep, this is equal to 2850 square feet of lot area. A new or enlarged building on such a lot should not exceed 2850 square feet of interior living area  $[1.0 \times (25 \times 1149 = 2850]]$ .

•The floor area of a new or enlarged building on a lot that is wider than 25 feet should not exceed 100% of the lot area for 25 feet of the lot width, plus 35% of the lot area for the width of the lot that exceeds 25 feet.

Example: There are many double-wide lots (50 x 114) in Dolores Heights. The maximum amount of interior living area recommended for a double-wide lot is 3847.5. This is calculated as follows: 2850 for the first 25 feet of lot width [1.0 x (25 x 114) = 2850], plus 997.5 for the remaining 25 feet of lot width [0.35 x (25 x 114) = 997.5].



Even a simplistic design can be visually interesting by use of mass and form

#### VIEW PROTECTION

## Guideline 1: Incorporate "good neighbor" gestures.

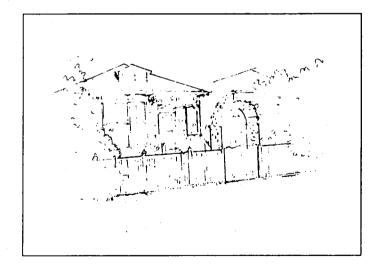
Often a partial set back, partial side yard, appropriate reduction in height, or variation of roof shape would prevent blockage of a neighbor's view, window, or light. These kinds of "good neighbor" gestures should be incorporated into building design.

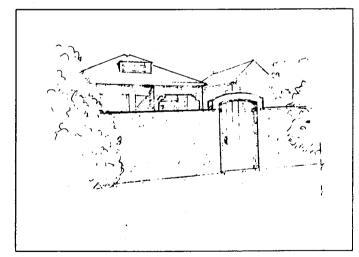
## Guideline 2: Arrange view windows to avoid obstruction by future development.

View windows and decks should be arranged to access views over dedicated open areas such as streets, required rear yard open space and air space above the 35 foot maximum building height. For most lots this will be at the front or rear of the building. The creation of new side view windows that are directed across the buildable area of adjacent lots are discouraged because of the strong potential for view obstruction by future development.

#### Guideline 3: Abide by planning codes to preserve views.

Uniform application of Planning Code provisions dealing with height, rear yards and setbacks will maximize access to views throughout the neighborhood. Variances, waivers and obstructions should not allow building that would obstruct public or private views.





With a low picket fence this house is visible from the street, the same house with a high stucco wall is no longer interactive with the street.

### **ENTRYWAYS AND GARAGES**

### **Entryways**

The pedestrian entry to a building, including doorways, porches, stairs and walkways, is often one of the most distinctive and appreciable elements of a building's façade. An interesting entryway can help to define style and scale, as well as conveying a sense of welcoming and celebration.

## Guideline 1: Pay particular attention to entryway design.

Entryway design should be compatible with the building and with neighboring buildings. Designers are encouraged to make the entryway something special and to incorporate a transition space between the street and the front door. Pedestrian entryways should be a more prominent design element than automobile entries.

### Parking and Garages

Circumstances of history and topography led many homes in Dolores Heights to be built without garages or off street parking. This has resulted in sidewalk and street areas with a pedestrian orientation, increased landscaping, and recreational or social use. In order to preserve those qualities, parking requirements should be interpreted in the context of actual need and should not result in the construction of unneeded or unwanted off-street parking.

### Guideline 1: Garage design.

A new garage should be compatible in scale and design with the attached building, surrounding buildings, and the blockface. A new garage should be sited in such a way that it does not disrupt an existing pattern of front yard open space. Garage doors should not exceed 10 feet in width and 8 feet in height. Recessed garage doors tend to de-emphasize the garage opening and are encouraged.

### Guideline 2: Tandem parking.

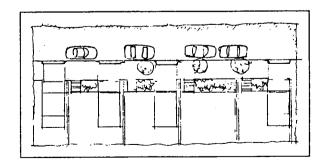
Garage designs that incorporate tandem (front to back) parking are encouraged.

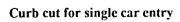
#### Guideline 3: Size of parking space

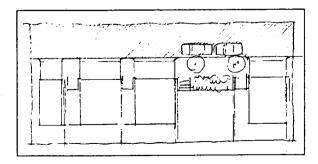
Compact parking spaces, with a minimum size of 127.5 square feet, are encouraged.

#### Guideline 4: Curb cuts

Not more than 8 feet of curb space should be removed for automobile access to a driveway or garage. Curb cuts shall be arranged so as to preserve a minimum 17 foot curb space fronting each lot or in such other way as would maximize the number and size of on-street parking spaces.







Curb cut for double car entry

#### LANDSCAPING

## Guideline 1: Maximize planted space and minimize impervious surfaces.

Existing trees and planted spaces should be maintained and preserved. New areas of visible greenery should be established whenever possible.

#### Guideline 2: Avoid planting that would obstruct views.

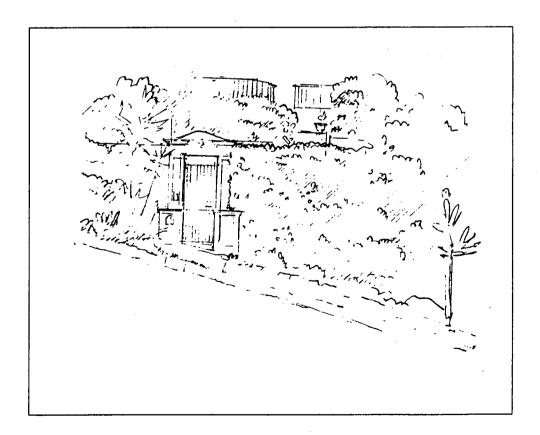
Although large trees are essential to the character of Dolores Heights, care must be taken when choosing the location for *new* trees so that at maturity they will not block or obscure views.

#### Guideline 3: Street tree selection.

New street trees should match or complement existing trees on the block. Consistent planting of a limited number of species of trees will enhance the visual harmony and definition of the neighborhood. Particularly appropriate species include: California Wild Lilac (Ceanothus 'Ray Hartman'), New Zealand Christmas Tree (Metrosideros-excelsus), Pittosporum euginoides, Red Flowering Gum (Eucalyptus ficofolia), and Victorian Box (Pittosporum undulatum).

#### Guideline 4: Maintenance of trees and landscaping.

Planted and landscaped areas should be maintained to avoid weedy or brushy overgrowth and accumulation of debris. Simple landscaping designs and use of native or drought tolerant plants tend to require the least maintenance.



An entry gate to a stairway, hidden behind an ivy-covered wall brings a sense of ceremony to the entryway and adds visual delight for the neighbors

#### **APPENDIX**

## The Dolores Heights Special Use District San Francisco Planning Code Section 241

In order to preserve and provide for an established area with a unique character and balance of built and natural environment, with public and private view corridors and panoramas, to conserve existing buildings, plant materials and planted spaces, to prevent unreasonable obstruction of view and light by buildings or plant materials, and to encourage development in context and scale with established character and landscape, there shall be a Dolores Heights Special Use District as designated on Section Map No. 7 SU of the Zoning Map. In this district, all provisions of the City Planning Code applicable in RH-1 Districts shall continue to apply except that rear yard and height limit provisions of this Section 241 shall be substituted for rear yard and height limit provisions found elsewhere in this Code.

- (a) The minimum rear yard depth shall be equal to 45 percent of the total depth of the lot on which building is situated, but in no case shall the rear yard be less than 25 feet deep.
- (b) No portion of a building shall exceed a height of 35 feet above the existing grade of the lot, with the intent that the building shall be contained within an envelope that slopes upward or downward with the slope of the property. The "height of a building" for purposes of this section shall be measured in the manner described in Section 102.12 of the City Planning Code, whether the lot being measured slopes upward or downward from the street.
- (c) Variances may be granted from the rear yard and height limit provisions in Paragraphs (a) and (b) above in accordance with procedures specified in Section 305 of the City Planning Code provided that no such variance shall permit a building to have a height in excess of that otherwise permitted in an RH-1 District.

### The San Francisco General Plan Urban Design Element, Objective 2, Policy 7

Recognize and protect outstanding and unique areas that contribute in an extraordinary degree to San Francisco's visual form and character.

All areas of San Francisco contribute in some degree to the visual form and image of the city. All require recognition and protection of their significant positive assets. Some areas may be more fortunately endowed than others, however, with unique characteristics for which the city is famous in the world at large. Where areas are so outstanding, they ought to be specially recognized in urban design planning and protected, if the need arises, from inconsistent new development that might upset their unique character.

These areas do not have buildings of uniform age and distinction, or individual features that can be readily singled out for preservation. It is the combination and eloquent interplay of buildings, landscaping, topography and other attributes that makes them outstanding. For that reason, special review of building proposals may be required to assure consistency with the basic character and scale of the area. Furthermore, the participation of neighborhood associations in these areas in a cooperative effort to maintain the established character, beyond the scope of public regulation, is essential to the long-term image of the areas and the city.

Special characteristics of outstanding and unique areas:

**Dolores Heights.** A uniform scale of buildings, mixed with abundant landscaping in yards and steep street areas. Rows of houses built from nearly identical plans that form complete or partial block frontages, arranged on hillside streets as a stepped-down series of flat or gabled roofs. Building setbacks with gardens set before Victorian facades and interesting entryways.

