

Existing Policy Language Regarding Town Character, Scale, and Rural Nature in Current General Plan

The current General Plan was reviewed for the following terms: *Scale*; *Character*; and *Rural*. These terms are found in the Design, Land Use, Open Space, Infrastructure, and Transportation Elements, as well as the Introduction to the General Plan and the General Plan Vision Statement.

SCALE

(General Plan Introduction) The architectural diversity and historic structures that form Arcata's special ambience and character are important community assets to be preserved for the future. The General Plan includes Design and Historical Preservation Elements that provide guidelines for compatible design and resource protection. The Design Element is intended to ensure community diversity and quality in the built environment, with small-scale structures that are harmonious with their neighborhood context and natural settings. The Historical Preservation Element designates significant landmarks and sites that are representative of the City's various periods in social and physical development. (General Plan Introduction)

(General Plan Introduction) General Plan Assumptions

1. Modest growth from 16,400 in 1997, to a 2020 population of about 20,000.
2. No new large-scale employers.
3. Continue to be a City where HSU, health providers, education facilities, small-scale manufacturing, agricultural, and retail trade are the primary employers.
4. HSU will operate year-round instruction and enrollment will increase from 7,500 in 1997 to 8,500 full-time equivalent students in 2020.
5. Infrastructure will be limited.
6. The Coastal Zone, resource constraints, and greenbelt will limit outward expansion.

(Design Element Introduction) Overview of Arcata's Design Character. The city of Arcata is located in a setting of great natural beauty. A sense of physical and visual separation from other communities is provided by extensive open space lands which surround the city. These include Arcata Bay, marsh lands, and agricultural lands to the south; the agricultural lands of the Arcata Bottoms to the west; the Mad River and its agricultural floodplain to the north; and forested hills to the east. For residents and visitors alike, the aesthetic encounter with the landscape of the North Coast is presented along the State Route 101 corridor and several other principal roadways. From the south, the State Route 101 parallels and provides scenic views to the marshes and open waters of Arcata Bay to the west and agricultural land with a forested coastal foothill backdrop to the east. The sense of scale and "fit" of the Arcata townscape complements this scenic rural coastal environment.

The overall urban form of the city consists of a dense and compact urban core centered around the Plaza and downtown, with a series of varied and dispersed residential neighborhoods extending into the hills and bordering agricultural areas. These provide residents with a range of housing environments and an immediate relationship to natural areas. Several interspersed agricultural areas accentuate the juxtaposition of town and country. Much of the character of Arcata is derived from the architectural styles of its buildings, particularly of older historical residences and commercial buildings near the City's center. For the most part, buildings are small in scale and only a few buildings are three stories or more in height.

(Design Element Objectives) Maintain a community with diversity and quality in the built environment; with small-scale structures that are harmonious with their neighborhood context; and with a sharp physical and visual distinction between the urban area and the surrounding open space lands.

(Design Element Policy 1-a) D-1a Maintain small scale of building.

Buildings shall be designed to maintain the small-scale character of the community.

1. This may be accomplished by breaking larger developments into several smaller buildings rather than constructing a single large, monolithic building.
2. This shall be accomplished by avoiding large, unbroken expanses of wall and roof planes.
3. This shall be accomplished by providing articulation in building mass, surfaces, rooflines, wall planes, and facades, and including architectural ornamentation.

(Design Element Policy 2-e) D-2e Design criteria for new structures and additions.

The height, scale, and mass (volume) of new buildings and additions to existing buildings shall be compatible with other buildings in the immediate vicinity. Each building shall have an entry from the sidewalk to the street-level floor. Building elevations shall be articulated: long, continuous, unbroken wall and roof planes should be avoided. The visual organization and proportions of building elevations — including the size, spacing and shape of window and door openings — should be consistent with neighboring buildings. Architectural detailing and ornamentation, such as cornices, eaves, recessed or covered entryways, and awnings, are encouraged. Design review

(Design Element Policy 5-a) D-5a Multi-family housing design.

Within each neighborhood where multi-family is allowed by the Land-Use Element, multi-unit housing designs should comply with the following criteria:

1. Buildings should maintain the scale and character of other residential structures in the immediate vicinity and avoid abrupt changes in height and bulk between structures.

(Design Element 5-b) D-5b Single-family residential design.

Design of single-family houses on existing lots in hillside areas shall adhere to the following additional criteria:

1. Disturbance of existing landforms (cut and fill) shall be minimized.

2. Terrain-adaptive architectural designs which fit into the contour of the hillside are encouraged, including:
 - a. Reduced-footprint design with multi-level structures;
 - b. Multiple "Step-up" or "step-down" structures;
 - c. Stilt houses, with enclosure of area underneath the building.
3. Significant trees and drainageways should not be disturbed.
4. Development should be confined to portions of a site which are less steeply sloped.
5. Garages should be located under or over the structure depending on whether the lot is uphill or downhill from the street.
6. The scale and character of buildings should be matched with the terrain, scale, and character of the surrounding neighborhood.

(Open Space Element 2-b) OS-2b Development limitations and management for maintenance of biotic resources and diversity, including aquatic resources and sensitive habitats.

Creeks, marshes, and wetlands are significant components of Arcata's natural open space system. The City shall restore and maintain this system for the benefit of residents, visitors, fish, and wildlife.

The Arcata Bay and tidelands represent an important natural edge and open space feature of the City. Buildings, landform alterations, or access routes in this area shall be of a design and scale that preserves open space and natural characteristics and maintains public views to the Bay.

CHARACTER

(Community Vision Statement) Our town is architecturally diverse. Arcata's urban and neighborhood character is enhanced by a diverse, architectural heritage. Our historic homes, classic commercial structures, craftsman cottages and contemporary buildings create a distinctive yet diverse character. New development complements the character of the neighborhood in which it is located.

(Open Space Element-Introduction) Overview of Arcata's Open Space Resources.

Arcata's open spaces take many forms and serve a variety of functions. Open space areas represent a significant and desirable component of the community's character and maintain natural, recreational, and visual resources for future community use and enjoyment.

(Historic Preservation Element-Guiding Principles and Goals)

Guiding Principles and Goals.

- A. Promote preservation of structures and sites that are representative of the various periods of the city's social and physical development.
- B. Preserve the historical character of the Plaza and the surrounding commercial district.

- C. Encourage owners of eligible structures to seek historic landmark status and to invest in restoration efforts.
- D. Conserve the many examples of early residential building styles found in the city's older neighborhoods, from Bayside to Arcata Heights.
- E. Assure that new construction and additions to existing historically-designated buildings maintain the character and livability of the historic neighborhoods.
- F. Promote interest in and appreciation of the value of Arcata's history and its heritage of historic buildings.
- G. Encourage tourism and economic development through historic resource preservation.
- H. Prevent destruction of archaeological and cultural resources and assure that any artifacts receive proper disposition.

(Design Element D-1) Overall Community Design Character-Objective.

Maintain a community with diversity and quality in the built environment; with small-scale structures that are harmonious with their neighborhood context; and with a sharp physical and visual distinction between the urban area and the surrounding open space lands.

(Transportation Element T-4) Streets and Highways Plan and Policy-Objectives.

Plan an internal street system consistent with Arcata's small-town, nonmetropolitan character and which:

- 1) Efficiently utilizes existing facilities and reduces need for investment in new or expanded street and highway facilities or capacities;
- 2) improves connectivity of streets to provide for direct routes between origins and destinations;
- 3) has a high quality of regular maintenance and repair; and 4) maintains a level of service which minimizes delays, but allows for higher levels of congestion during the short peak periods on weekdays.

(Historic Preservation Element 4-c) H-4c Design review.

All structures located within an NCA, including single-family houses, historic structures identified in specific plans, and existing structures with exterior alterations or renovation of more than 25 percent of the floor and/or exterior wall area, shall be subject to approval. Prior to approval, the finding must be made that the design will be compatible with the existing character of the NCA.

(Historic Preservation Element 4-d) H-4d Rehabilitation assistance programs.

Any City-sponsored or assisted rehabilitation programs shall give priority to qualifying structures within the boundaries of NCAs. Such rehabilitation shall be consistent with the architectural and aesthetic character of the area and the individual structure.

(Historic Preservation Element 4-e) H-4e Design criteria for alterations and additions.

Prior to approval of any exterior change requiring a building permit, the Design Review Commission shall make a finding that the alteration or addition is compatible with and does not destroy the historical or architectural character of the property and the surrounding neighborhood conservation area.

(Historic Preservation Element H-5) H-5 Controls on Demolition of Structures.

Objective. To prevent the premature demolition of existing buildings without first evaluating whether they are contributory to the historical or architectural character of the City or neighborhood and to consider the potential for preservation of those found to contribute to such character.

(Land Use Element D-5) D-5b Single-family residential design.

The intent in single-family residential design shall be to allow maximum flexibility consistent with maintaining existing community character. Maintaining character means architectural style consistency, structures proportional to the site and surroundings, and harmony with the design of adjacent buildings. Good design respects its neighbors, is properly sited for privacy and solar access, minimizes disturbance of natural site conditions, and is landscaped to complement the streetscape, including street trees where appropriate.

(Land Use Element LU-2a) Residential Land Use Classification.

Residential Very Low Density [R-VL]. This designation allows the lowest density residential development in areas where physical constraints, protection of natural features, or preservation of semi-rural character are important considerations. The R-VL designation is applicable primarily for lands with steep slopes and where the open space character of Arcata's hillsides and perimeter lands are to be preserved. Individual homesites are allowed in hillside areas, as long as precautions are taken to prevent the excessive removal of...

(Open Space Element OS-1f) Designation of lands with scenic, aesthetic, historic, and cultural value.

The City has scenic routes, including State Route 101 and Samoa Boulevard; vistas, including the forested slopes of Fickle Hill and the Arcata Bottoms; and areas of historic and cultural value, such as the Plaza. The open and natural characteristics of these areas shall be maintained. Policies for retaining scenic vistas and landscape features are included in the Community Design Element of the General Plan.

(Public Facilities and Infrastructure Element) Overview of Arcata's Educational and Public Facilities.

Public facilities offer locations for community interaction and events, ranging from community-wide celebrations to group meetings, instructional classes, and weddings. The City has enclosed spaces such as the Community Pool, Community Center, City Hall, schools, and places of worship. The City also has twenty-four separate parks including Redwood Park, the Marsh and its interpretive center and the Arcata Ballpark. Collectively, they provide gathering places for all manner of social, cultural, political, recreational, religious, educational, and entertainment events. Their physical form and design are also important in representing recognizable features that strengthen community identity. Arcatans have come to recognize that their public facilities are important components of community character.

RURAL

(Land Use Element LU-2a) Residential Land Use Classifications.

Residential Very Low Density (R-VL). The R-VL designation allows creation of lots as small as 20,000 square feet, in the less-steep areas of Arcata's hillsides. Newly created lots in this zone must contain a buildable area of sufficient size and flatness to allow development without significant environmental damage or landform alteration. The development regulations for R-VL are intended to balance protection of the sensitive hillside environment with the need for quality housing sites. This designation is also intended to protect the existing rural environment in certain areas of Arcata and to provide a transition between urban uses and agricultural operations.

(Noise Element) Noise environment overview.

Arcata has experienced change from its small, rural town beginnings to a growing, urban community with more intensive and diverse uses. Preservation of surrounding open spaces, and General Plan policies for more efficient land uses, have promoted in-fill urban development which intersperses residential uses (noise receptors) with commercial and industrial land uses (noise generators). The proximity of noise generators to noise receptors such as higher volume vehicle travel on local roadways has resulted in increased noise levels at receptor sites. Future development of commercial and industrial uses will increase the potential for future noise conflicts.

(Transportation Element) Overview of Existing and Future Transportation Conditions.

Existing Roadway System. Arcata's pattern of highways and streets is similar to many small and rural communities. The central business district has a traditional grid pattern of streets, with a one-way couplet system comprising the primary arterial. A non-grid series of arterial and collector streets surrounds the central business district and serves outlying residential subdivisions, neighborhood shopping centers, Humboldt State University, and industrial areas. On the outer edges of Arcata, the transportation system is comprised of rural roads and highways serving isolated farms and residences. Arcata is bisected by the State Route 101 freeway, the main state route serving the North Coast of California from San Francisco to Oregon.

(Transportation Element) Functional Classifications of the Street System.

Rural Roads. Rural roads are generally two-lane unimproved facilities located on the outer edges of the community. Their primary function is to provide connection and access to farms, isolated residential areas, and industrial uses. Rural roads usually do not have typical urban improvements such as underground drainage, lighting, sidewalks, or curbs and gutters. Examples of rural roads in the Arcata area include Mad River Road, Upper Bay Road, Jackson Ranch Road, the western portion of Foster Avenue, and Jacoby Creek Road.

(Transportation Element T-4)T-4a Freeways and Highways.

State Routes 101 and 299 are designated as freeways for their entire length in the City. State Route 255 is designated as both an arterial and a highway within the City. The following standards shall apply to these classifications:

5. Landscaping. The City encourages Caltrans to maintain and improve landscaping along freeway corridors in Arcata and surrounding areas to improve aesthetics, provide a visual and noise buffer, and maintain the rural and small- town character of the region.

(Transportation Element T-4)T-4e Rural Roads.

Routes designated as rural roads are shown on the functional classification map in Figure T-a. The following standards shall apply to these roads:

1. Functional classification. Rural roads serve very low density land uses (mostly agricultural and rural residential) outside of the urbanized area of Arcata. Rural roads are usually not intended to serve through traffic, but often accommodate truck traffic related to the land uses served.
2. Maintain rural character. Rural roads shall be maintained in a manner which will retain their rural character and discourage use as alternatives to arterials and highways for longer distance travel.