

CITY OF SIGNAL HILL

View Protection Policy

Section 1. Purpose

The hillsides in Signal Hill provide the City with its most identifying feature. The views both from and of the hill are a limited natural resource, enjoyed by residents and visitors. The City's General Plan discusses the importance of views in several of the General Plan Elements. The Environmental Resources Element states that one of the City's goals is to "maintain and enhance the identity and aesthetic quality of Signal Hill as a City with striking view potential." That Element also includes Policy 1.1, which states the City will "protect views both to and from the Hill and other scenic features. This will extend to all new development and to major rebuilding and additions."

Specifically, this View Protection Policy accomplishes the following:

1. Clarifies the circumstances under which a view analysis is required.
2. Establishes procedures for providing proper notice of potential view impacts.
3. Establishes guidelines against which views will be determined eligible for preservation.
4. Establishes acceptable methods of analysis and provides guidelines for evaluation of results.
5. Establishes guidelines for the recommendations of modifications to proposed projects in order to protect views.

Section 2. Procedures and Requirements For Level 1 View Analysis

Any person proposing to develop a project which requires Site Plan and Design Review, as specified in Chapter 20.52 of the Signal Hill Municipal Code, shall submit with the Site Plan and Design Review application, a Level 1 view analysis. The Level 1 view analysis shall contain the following information:

1. A description of the topography of the project site and of all sites within 500 feet of the subject site.
2. A description of all uses and structures within 500 feet of the subject site.
3. A description of the potential view impacts of the proposed project on any property within 500 feet of the subject site.

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The applicant may use a variety of methods to provide the information required, including but not limited to photographs, plot plans, grading plans, streetscapes, pad elevations, written descriptions, and documentation from neighboring residents and/or property owners.

The Planning Department shall verify the accuracy of the information provided through site visits and comparison of data with existing City records concerning the site.

Section 3. Procedures and Requirements for Level 2 View Analysis

A. Circumstances Requiring Level 2 View Analysis --

A Level 2 view analysis shall be required when the following conditions exist:

1. A Level 1 view analysis indicates that a proposed project may impact existing views.
2. A Level 1 view analysis indicates a proposed project will not impact existing views, but staff is unable to verify the accuracy of that analysis.

B. Noticing For Level 2 View Analysis --

All projects which require a Level 2 view analysis shall be noticed in the following manner:

1. The applicant shall take reasonable steps established by the City to consult with owners and residents of property located within 500 feet of the subject site. The applicant shall submit to the Planning Department the signatures of all individuals with whom the applicant consulted.
2. The applicant shall submit two sets of mailing labels for all property owners, residents, and homeowners' associations within 500 feet of the subject site. The City shall send a written notice of potential view impacts to each individual. Such notice shall contain a deadline for written comments.
3. The applicant shall post a copy of the view impact notice on the property. The notice shall be readable and/or readily accessible from the public right-of-way.

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4. The Director of Planning may reduce the noticing requirements if a Level 1 view analysis clearly indicates that limited numbers of existing structures will be affected by the proposed development. In such instance, only the affected owners/residents would require special notice.

C. Preparation of Level 2 View Analysis

1. An applicant shall provide a description of all existing views from an affected unit. Such description may include photography and/or narrative.
2. The applicant shall evaluate each affected view to determine if each view qualifies as a "primary view" or "secondary view" eligible for preservation. Standards for evaluation are contained in Section 3,D.
3. Staff shall verify the accuracy of the evaluation completed by the applicant.
4. A Level 3 analysis shall be completed for all views determined to be primary or secondary views.

D. Designation of Primary and Secondary Views

1. An applicant shall designate the primary and secondary viewing areas in each affected building.
2. A viewing area shall be designated a "primary viewing area" if two or more of the following conditions exist:
 - a. The view is the only view in the structure.
 - b. The view is the resident's most important view.
 - c. The subject of the view is a unique landmark, such as the Queen Mary, Long Beach Skyline, Palos Verdes, ocean, Los Angeles, San Gabriel/Santa Ana mountains.
3. A viewing area shall be designated a "secondary viewing area" if only one of the above conditions exists.
4. A viewing area excludes bathrooms, hallways, garages, closets, and outdoor required setback areas.

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5. The following view subjects are not eligible for analysis or preservation.
 - a. Buildings on neighboring lots;
 - b. The sky;
 - c. Vacant land that is developable under City code;
 - d. Alleys or streets.

E. Preparation of Level 3 View Analysis

1. The applicant shall consult with the Planning Department to determine the appropriate methods of analysis based on the site location, the type of proposed project, the potential view impacts, and the topography. Acceptable methods for a Level 3 View Analysis may include one or more of the following:
 - a. The applicant should photograph the existing view, use on-site markers to establish scale and perspective, and superimpose (draw) the outline of the proposed structure on the photographs.
 - b. The applicant should use a plot plan to show the location of the proposed structure relative to existing units and indicate the horizontal view area.
 - c. The applicant should photograph and/or sketch a streetscape showing pad elevations of existing and proposed structures and indicate existing verticle views.
 - d. The applicant should prepare a computer generated analysis.
2. An applicant may be required to prepare more than one analysis for each view, if the Director of Planning determines that one analysis may not accurately represent the potential impact. For example, an applicant may be required to analyze the view from an outdoor balcony, and analyze the same view from a location within the unit. All analyses should be taken between 4 feet and 6 feet above floor level.
3. Any affected property owner or resident who challenges the accuracy of an applicant's analysis may prepare a view analysis for review by the Planning Commission.

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Section 4. Evaluation of View Analysis

- A. All projects shall preserve, to the extent possible, all views designated as "primary views" and "secondary views" with greater emphasis placed on the preservation of "primary views."
- B. In an effort to preserve existing views, an applicant may be required to make any or all of the following modifications to the proposed project:
 - ▶ Reduce square footage;
 - ▶ Increase setbacks;
 - ▶ Eliminate bedrooms;
 - ▶ Revise roofline including decreasing the area of a second story;
 - ▶ Revise floor plan.

Section 5. Amendments

To the extent the Planning Commission finds that changes to this Policy are necessary to effectuate or enhance the purposes of this Policy as stated in Section 1, the Planning Commission may amend this policy at any time.