



City of Martinez

525 Henrietta Street, Martinez, CA 94553-2394

DESIGN REVIEW APPLICATION GUIDE

PURPOSE: The purpose of the design review process is to promote quality architectural design, good site relationships, attractive landscaping, and other aesthetic considerations of development in the City. Design review is a tool to help buildings “fit in” a neighborhood and reflect the community’s vision for how an area should look. Design review regulates the design of structures, signage, and other elements on property. All elements of a project can be reviewed such as choice of building materials, architectural style, window details, grading, drainage, and finishes such as color, railings, and hardware.

WHEN IS A DESIGN REVIEW PERMIT REQUIRED? Design review approval is required for single-family residence projects when: 1) the slope or natural grade under the proposed structure is 10% or greater (see the Hillside Development Regulations handout for more information), 2) an undeveloped parcel adjoining one or more undeveloped parcels is under the same ownership, 3) located in a visually significant area, or 4) located within a seismic or geologic hazard area. Design review approval is also required for projects to alter the exterior of an office, commercial, and industrial building; non-residential projects; multi-family residential developments (planned unit developments, subdivisions, etc.); signage, and some conditional use permits.

PROCESS: Submit a planning application form and fees with all appropriate items addressed from the application submittal requirements. An application must be deemed complete before review can begin. Planning staff will then study the request, assess the impact and design consideration of the proposal, and may conduct an investigation of the site.

Since design review is usually the first step in the project approval process, an approval of the project design should be completed prior to advancing the project to other hearing bodies, although applications may be processed concurrently with other permits such as a variance, conditional use permit, planned unit development, and/or major subdivision. The estimated processing time for an approval once an application is deemed complete is about 30-45 days. A design review decision may be appealed to a higher body.

The decision to approve design review for a proposal may be made administratively by planning staff, or depending on the complexity of the proposal, referred to the Design Review Committee (DRC)¹ or the Planning Commission. In most cases, the DRC takes the lead in approving the design elements of a project. At the DRC meeting planning staff will provide brief oral comments and the DRC Chair will lead the discussion and review. At the end of the meeting, the DRC will provide written comments to the applicant and will indicate whether they would wish to see the project again.

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¹ The DRC is appointed by the City Council to review the design aspects of proposals and make recommendations to planning staff, Zoning Administrator, Planning Commission, and/or City Council. The DRC usually consist of architects, landscape architects, and members of the public.