



Palo Alto
Single-Family
Individual Review
Guidelines

June 10, 2005

CITY OF PALO ALTO

Department of Planning & Development Services

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Acknowledgements

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Note: Consistency with these guidelines is required for each proposal to be approved

The Single-Family Individual Review process and the applicability of these guidelines were established by PAMC 18.12.110 to preserve the character of Palo Alto neighborhoods by placing specific requirements relating to streetscape, massing and privacy of new two-story homes and upper story additions within the R-1 zone district.

These “updated” guidelines replace the 2001 guidelines that were modified in 2004, as recommended by the Planning and Transportation Commission. The updated guidelines do not change the objectives of the previous edition, but intend to more clearly emphasize and better illustrate them. The IR process is not design review, nor intended to prescribe specific architectural styles.

Applicability

- New two-story homes.
- New second-story additions to existing one-story homes.
- Expansion of an existing upper story that exceeds 150 square feet.
- Modifications to previously approved IR projects.
- Existing portions of a structure to be remodeled are exempt from these guidelines.

Goals

- Preserve the unique character of Palo Alto neighborhoods, recognizing that the visual unity of a street and shared architectural and site features of nearby property will result in varied design responses per each particular neighborhood context.
- Promote new construction that is compatible with existing and evolving residential neighborhoods’ site development patterns, mass and scale, and streetscape appearance.
- Encourage new two-story houses and second-story additions that balance diversity of style with respect for the surrounding context.
- Foster consideration of neighbors’ concerns regarding privacy, scale, massing and streetscape.

How to use

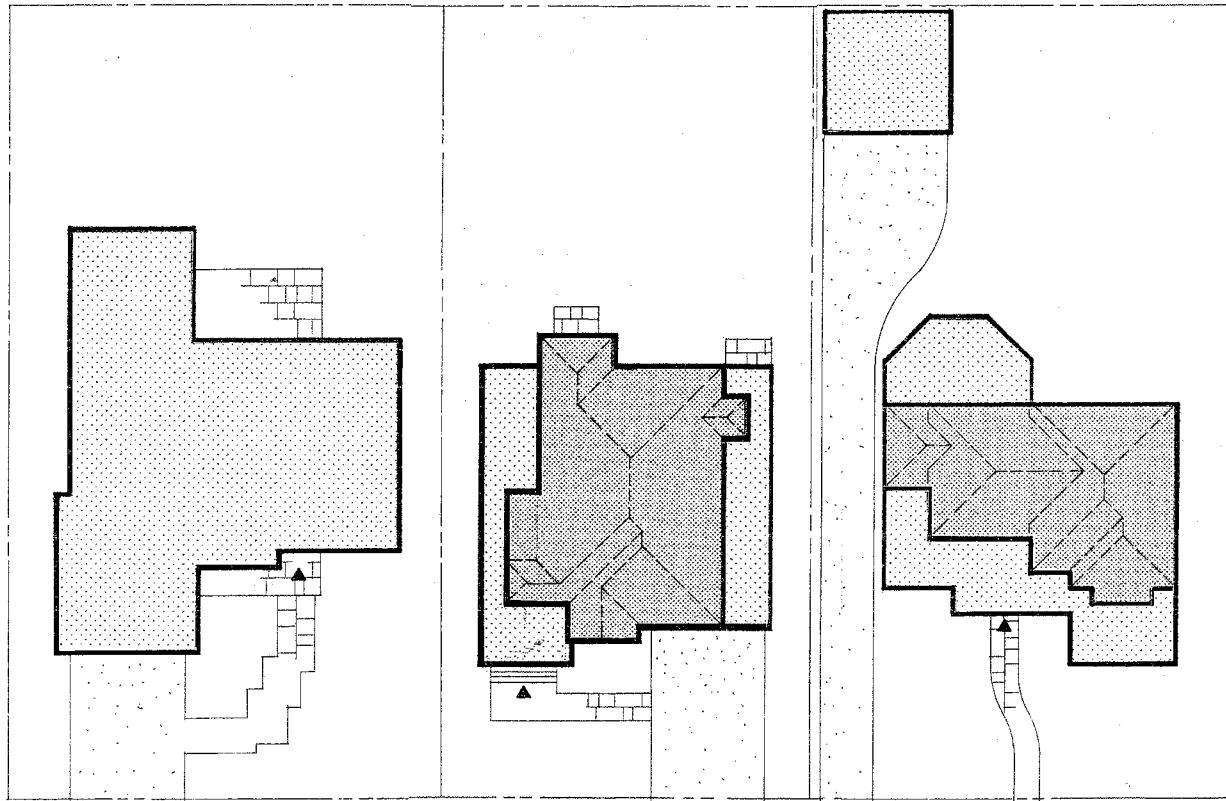
- Each guideline covers an aspect of residential development essential to meeting the goals of the Individual Review (IR) program.
- Each guideline has a criterion statement that must be met to obtain IR approval.
- The illustrations show examples of houses that **do not** and **do** meet each guideline. Some examples are tailored to specific neighborhood types.
- The “Key Points” that follow the illustrations provide additional direction and reminders that are useful in meeting the guidelines.

Guideline One

Basic Site Planning: Placement of Driveway, Garage and House

Approval Criterion:

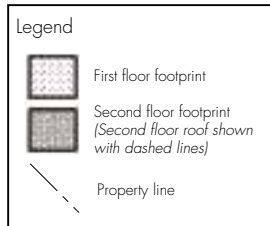
The driveway, garage and house shall be placed and configured to reinforce the neighborhood's existing site patterns (i.e., building footprint configuration and location, setbacks, and yard areas) and the garage and driveway shall be subordinate to the house, landscaping and pedestrian entry as seen from the street.



Adjacent house footprint

Initial inappropriate site layout

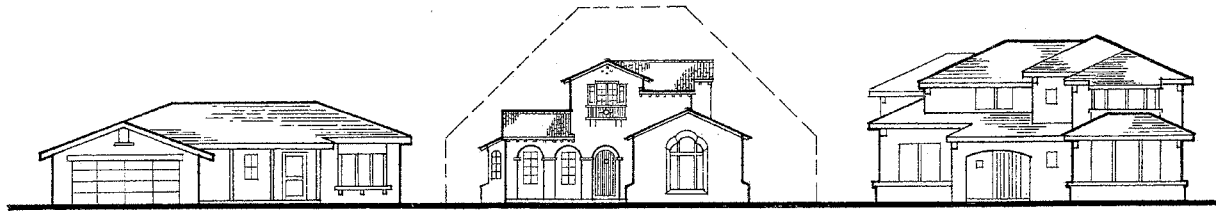
Adjacent house footprint



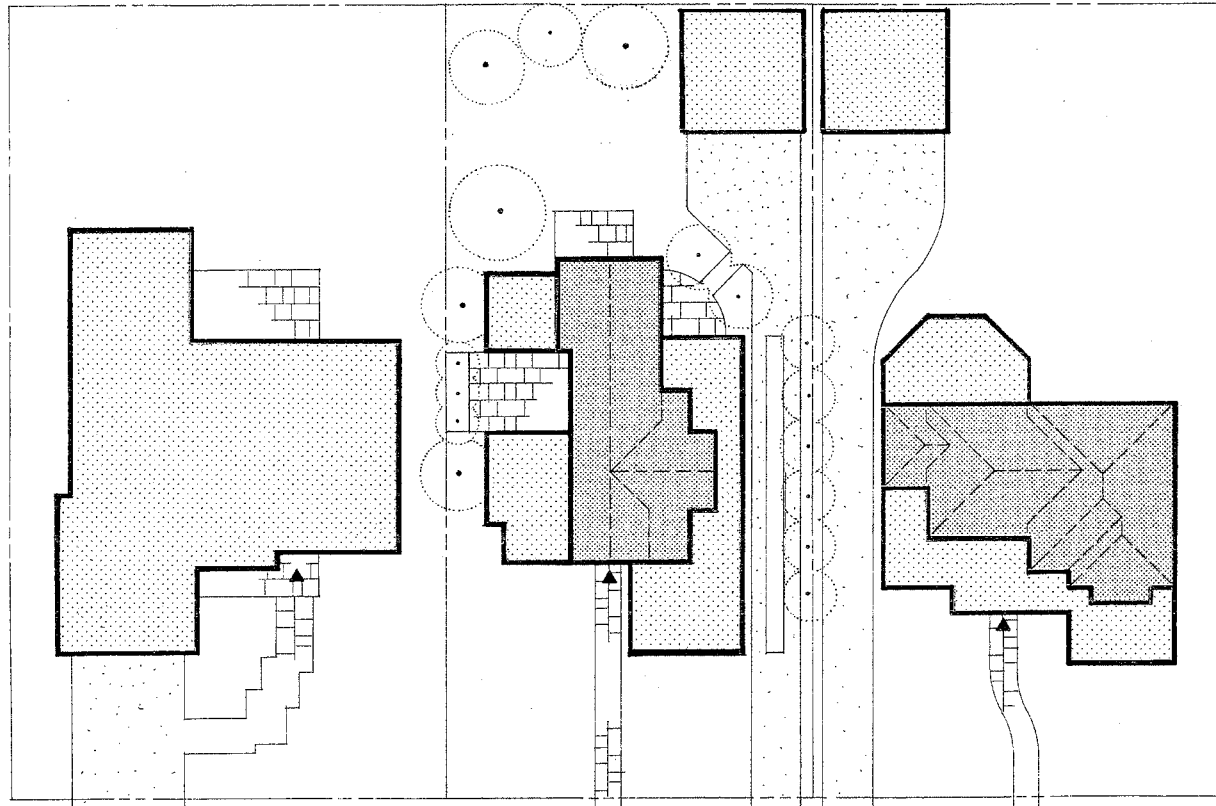
- Stacked, overly square floor plans contribute to boxy, high impact building mass
- Side yards are leftover spaces; footprint ignores open space pattern between homes
- Garage and driveway location do little to minimize their impact on the streetscape; relates poorly to the abutting property

1A: Does NOT meet guideline





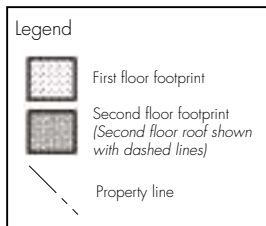
Key Points Site Planning



Adjacent house footprint

Alternate appropriate site layout

Adjacent house footprint

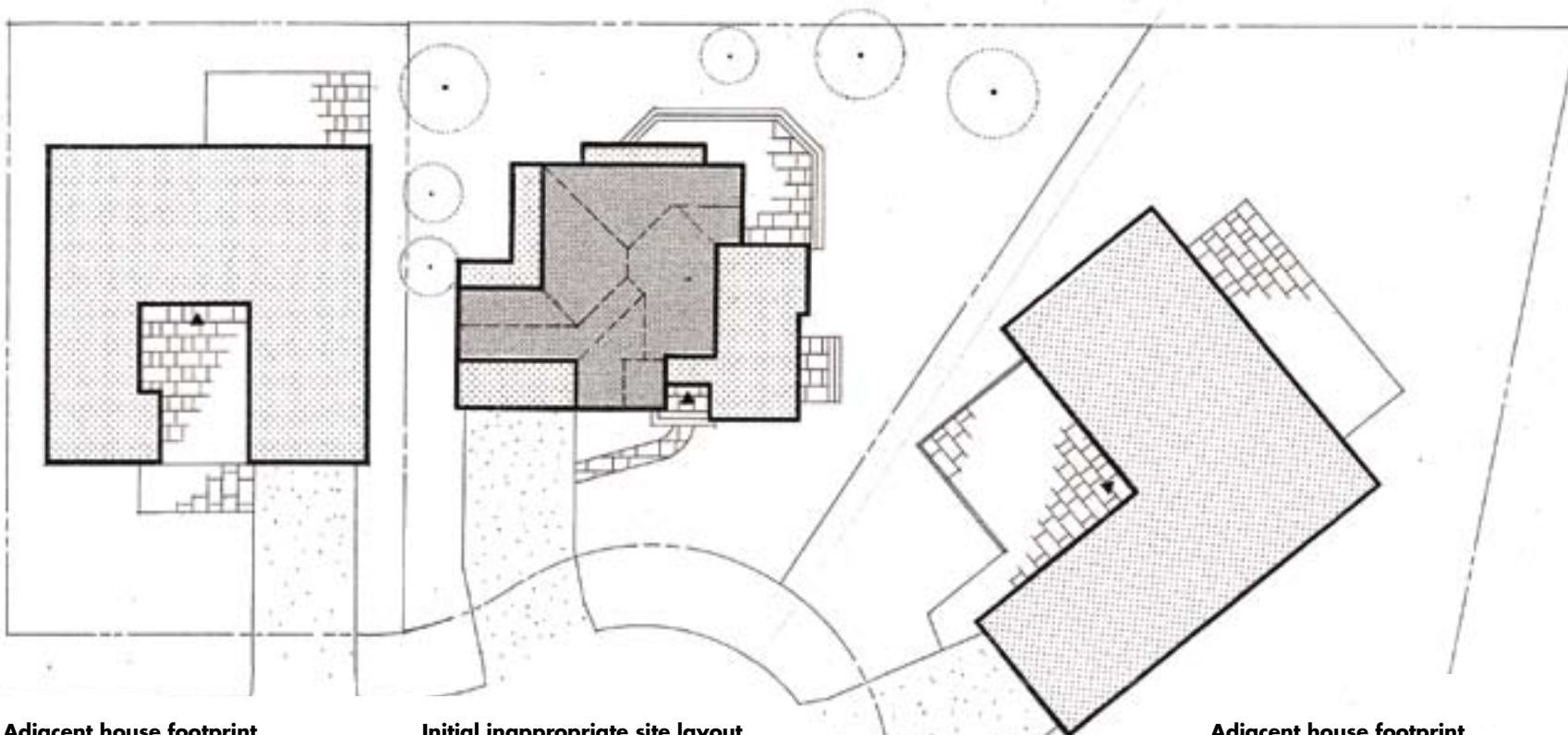


- Elongated footprint and narrow, carefully positioned upper floor take cues from adjacent homes and minimize building mass
- Yard areas are integral to the overall site and building design; open space reinforces the neighborhood pattern
- Garage and driveway location enhance neighborhood pedestrian and aesthetic qualities, are clearly subordinate to house, landscaping, and entry, and reflect neighbor's site plan

1. Locate driveways and minimize paving to diminish the driveway's presence and to highlight yards and pedestrian entryways.
2. Locate garages to be minimally visible or significantly less prominent than the house. Attached garages could be a one-car garage, narrower in width relative to the house, set-back from the house's front façade, or otherwise subordinated to the house.
3. Configure the site plan and footprint of the house so it is a "custom fit" with the neighborhood. Avoid imposing a compact rectangular building footprint on the site if adjacent homes have sprawling, elongated or irregularly shaped footprints.
4. Create landscaped open space between homes to respond to the neighborhood context.
5. Locate an upper floor well back from the front façade and/or away from side lot lines if the home is adjacent to small or one-story homes.
6. Avoid placing a second story such that it would emphasize the garage.

1B: Does meet guideline

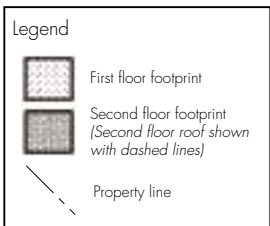




Adjacent house footprint

Initial inappropriate site layout

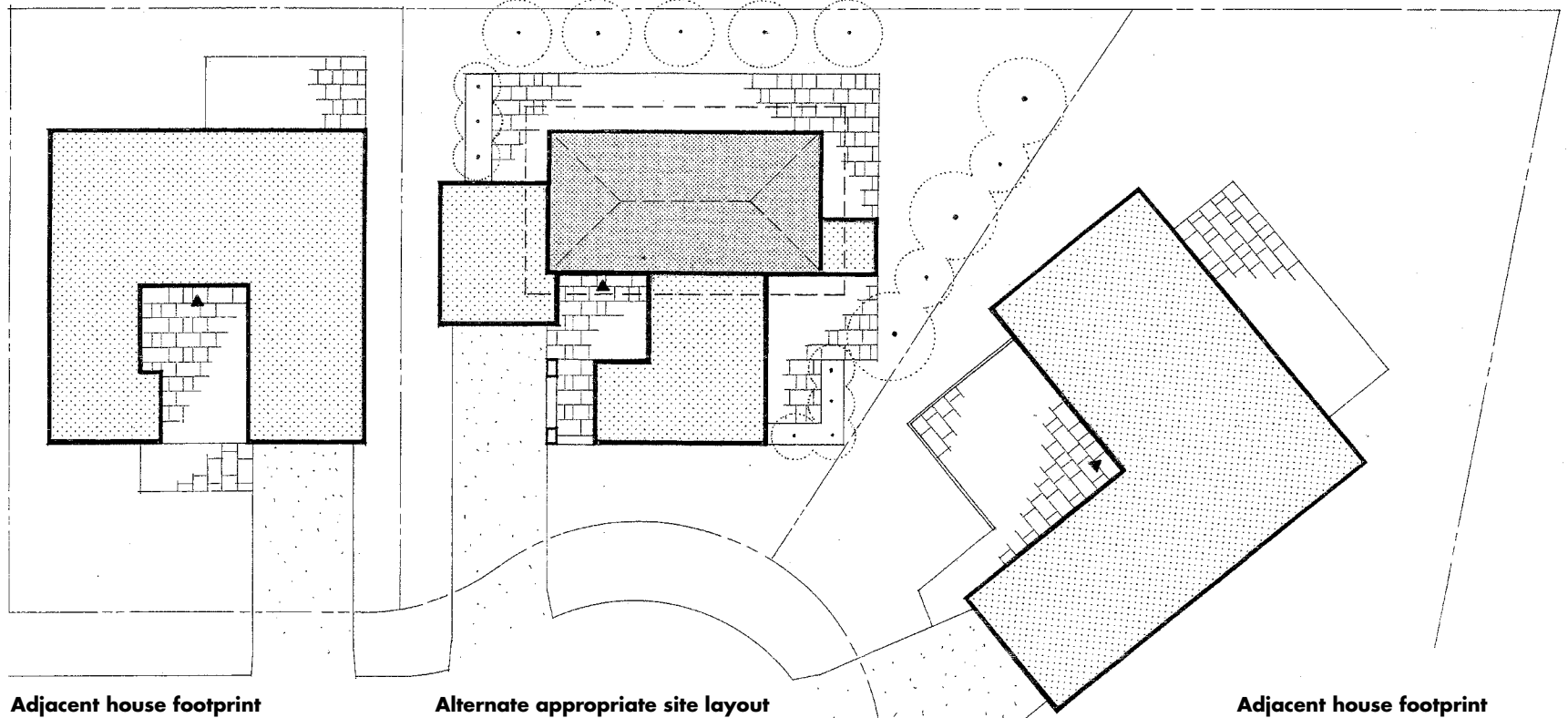
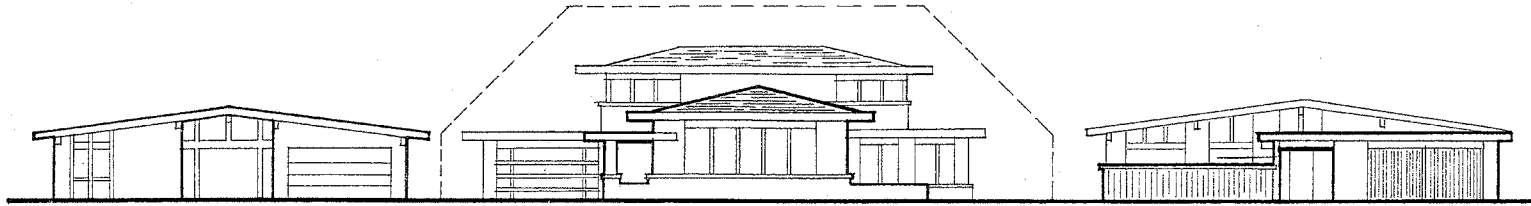
Adjacent house footprint



- Compact footprint centered on lot and prominent upper floor are intrusive to the neighborhood character of low profile homes with spreading footprints
- House ignores neighborhood patterns such as entry courts, integration of house interiors with yards; sited to be an “object” building, not part of a broad horizontal landscape
- Garage and driveway are equal, not subordinate streetscape elements

1C: Does NOT meet guideline








Adjacent house footprint

Alternate appropriate site layout

Adjacent house footprint

Legend

-  First floor footprint
-  Second floor footprint
(Second floor roof shown with dashed lines)
-  Property line

- House footprint spreads on site, utilizing and organizing the entire site; second floor is set far back to diminish its impact on low one-story context
- Yards, patios, and entry court integrate with the landscape and are inspired by the neighborhood pattern
- Garage is a subordinate one-story wing and transitional massing element; garage, entry court adjacency fits neighborhood pattern without garage becoming a visual focal point

1D: Does meet guideline



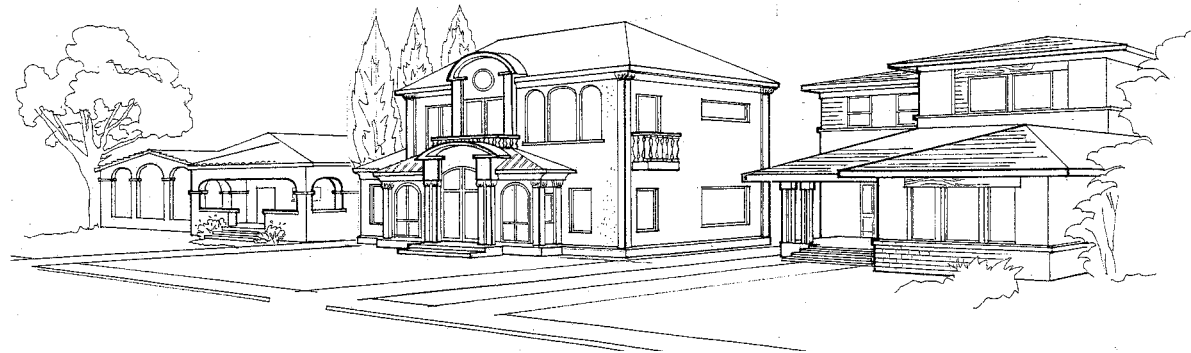
Guideline **TWO**

Neighborhood Compatibility for Height, Mass and Scale*

Approval Criterion:

The scale (perceived size), mass (bulk or volume) and height (vertical profile) of a new house or upper story addition shall be consistent with the existing neighborhood pattern with special attention to adapting to the height and massing of adjacent homes.

* *Meeting this guideline may require a house to be substantially lower than the maximum height limit (30 feet) set forth in the R-1 regulations.*



Existing 1-story house

Inappropriate height, mass & scale

Existing 2-story house

- Eaves, ridgeline extend above neighbors'; tall wall planes exaggerate perceived height
- Vertically proportioned building massing with no transitional forms
- Additive, monumentally scaled forms exaggerate contrast to neighborhood

2A: Does NOT meet guideline



Key Points

Height, Mass & Scale



Existing 1-story house

Appropriate height, mass & scale

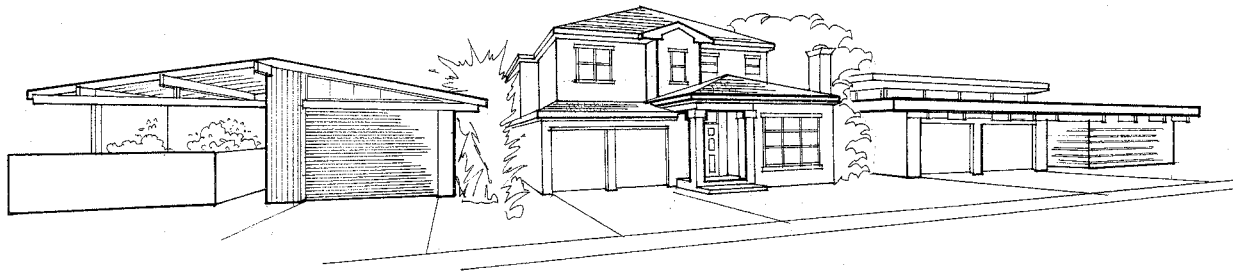
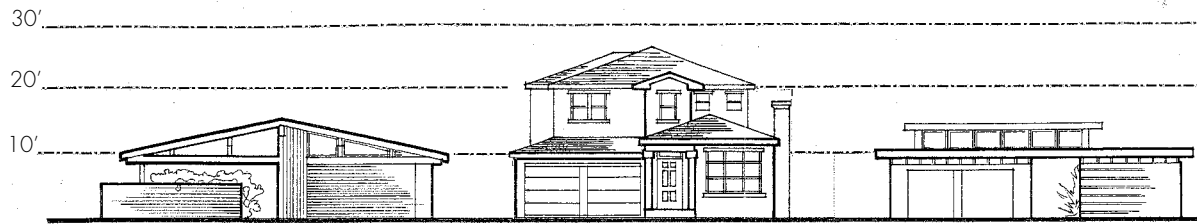
- Eaves and ridgeline heights relate to neighbors; second floor contained within roof form
- Receding roofline redistributes volume away from street, reducing visible mass; horizontal dormer further downplays mass
- Neighborhood scale acknowledged by broad porch with low eave line

Existing 2-story house

1. Avoid overwhelming adjacent one-story homes with large masses, monumental forms and sharp contrasts in height. Incorporate a lower height and profile and place more floor area on the first level than the second level whenever possible.
2. Avoid first floor levels placed high above ground level, tall wall planes, boxy forms, and strong vertical elements, which accentuate mass and scale.
3. Avoid a significant height contrast between adjacent roof edges including single-story roof edges.
4. Place floor area within the roof volume to mitigate height, mass and scale.
5. Locate smaller volumes in front of large volumes or choose appropriate roof pitches and forms to manage perceived height.
6. Avoid large unused attics and tall ceiling heights at perimeter walls. Instead, use the underside of the roof form to define ceilings to provide interior volume.

2B: Does meet guideline





Existing 1-story house

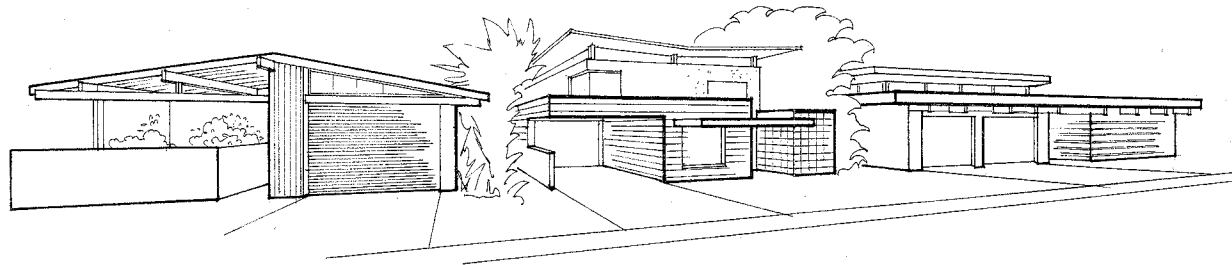
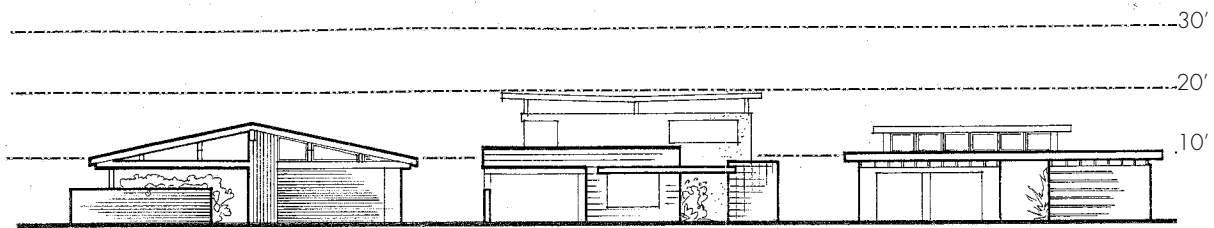
Inappropriate height, mass & scale

Existing 1-story house

- Broad upper floor roof is almost twice the height of neighboring roof lines and calls attention to height incompatibility
- Additive/stacked massing forms disrupt the massing profile of the streetscape
- Wide second floor volume defines scale, which is not mitigated by the tacked-on one-story mass

2C: Does NOT meet guideline





Existing 1-story house

Appropriate height, mass & scale

Existing 1-story house

- Low upper story roof profile obscures impact of second floor on height context
- Horizontal lines, subtractive massing blend with streetscape
- Wide, horizontally proportioned one-story base defines scale

2D: Does meet guideline

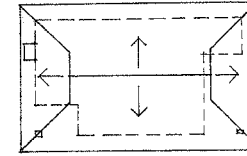
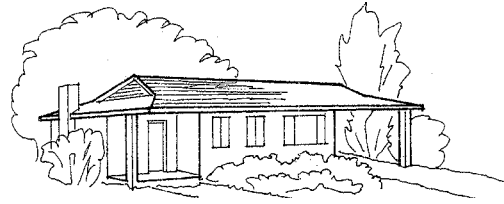


Guideline Three

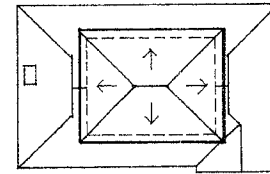
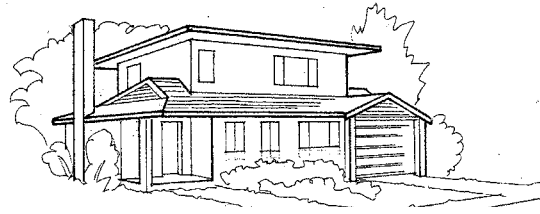
Resolution of Architectural Form, Massing and Roof Lines

Approval Criterion:

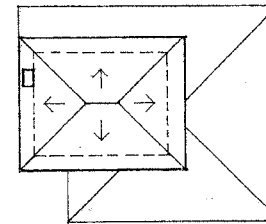
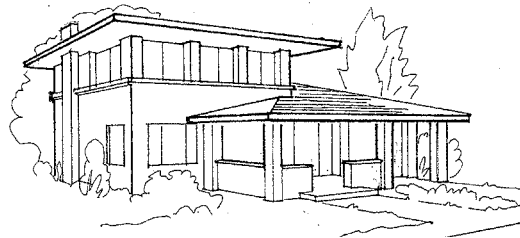
The architectural form and massing shall be carefully crafted to reduce visual mass, and distinguish the house's architectural lines or style. Roof profiles shall enhance the form, scale and proportion of primary and secondary house volumes, while rendering garage and entry forms subordinate in mass and scale to principal building forms. Upper floor additions shall also be balanced and integrated with the existing building.



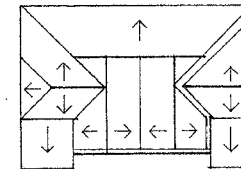
Existing single story house



3A: Does NOT meet guideline



3B: Does meet guideline



3C: Does meet guideline



Existing 1-story house

Inappropriate 2nd-story addition

- Awkward layer-cake silhouette
- Stories not interrelated; an obvious addition
- Disjointed massing highlights second floor and garage

Appropriate 2nd-story addition

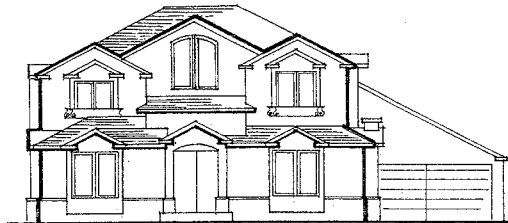
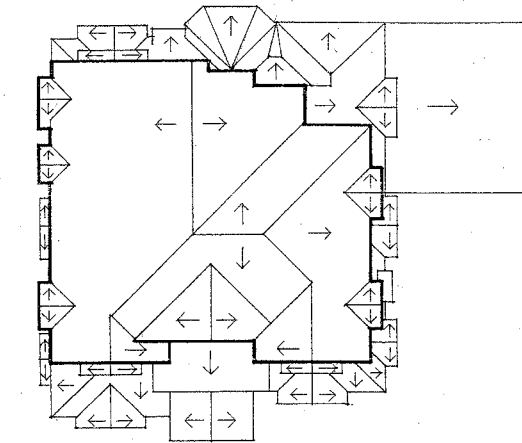
- Lower roof form enwraps second floor, integrates massing
- Clear simple rooflines, no disjointed, awkward, or leftover roof segments
- Horizontal wall and eave lines reduce mass, distinguish proportion and style

Appropriate 2nd-story addition

- New rooflines transform architectural style (an alternative to demolition)
- Double gable front wall defines form; tapering rooflines control mass
- Entry porch identity due to form and location; subordinate in mass, scale

Key Points

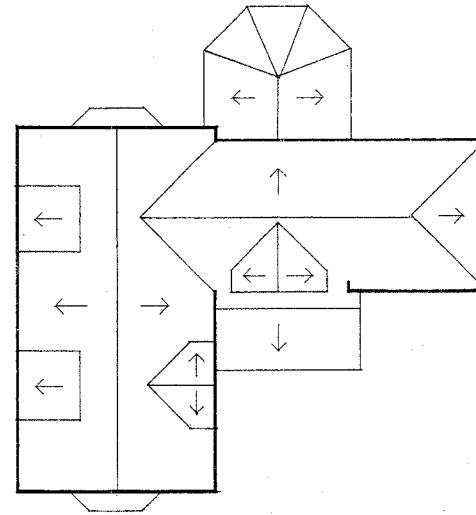
Form & Rooflines



Inappropriate roof forms

- Disorganized layout randomly blankets large floor plan; accentuates mass
- Primary roof form large, bulky; multiple tacked-on gables cluttered, busy
- Over reliance on gables creates unbalanced composition; increases scale
- Shed roof over garage calls attention to itself and does not relate well to the other roof forms

3D: Does NOT meet guideline ❌



Appropriate roof forms

- Simple L shaped roof geometry organizes the floor plan
- Proportions and scale aided by the hierarchy of primary and secondary forms
- Roof silhouette reduces visual mass; bays, dormers used selectively
- Architectural style clarified; garage is a subordinate design element

3E : Does meet guideline ✅

1. Avoid forcing building mass and rooflines to fit a detailed or interior design-driven floor plan. Test roof layouts and massing profiles early in the design process and adjust floor plans to create the best three-dimensional design.
2. Consider using the vocabulary of a particular architectural style to define a home's visual form, compose its massing and determine roof pitches, eave lines and details.
3. Avoid awkwardly placed second floor additions, poorly combined roof forms and inconsistent roof slopes when planning an addition. Primary and secondary volumes should be carefully proportioned and spaced for a unified design.
4. A good basic massing strategy is to use a few simple, well-proportioned masses accented with a few smaller elements, such as bay windows or dormers. Using too many elements can create clutter.
5. Adjust roof layout, ridge orientation, and roof pitch; vary eave lines, and lower eave height facing the street or adjacent homes, where beneficial to reduce mass and enhance form.

Guideline **Four**

Visual Character of Street Facing Facades and Entries

Approval Criterion:

Publicly viewed facades shall be composed with a clear and cohesive architectural expression (i.e., the composition and articulation of walls, fenestrations and eave lines), and include visual focal point(s) and the supportive use of materials and detailing.

Entries shall be consistent with the existing neighborhood pattern and integrated with the home in composition, scale and design character. The carport or garage and garage door design shall be consistent with the selected architectural style of the home.

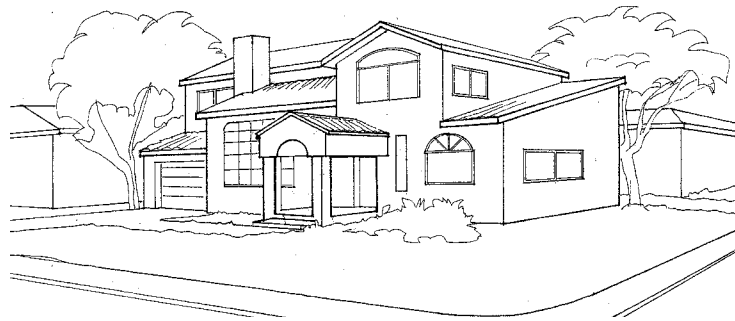


4A: Does NOT meet guideline



Inappropriate facade and entry design

- Random collection of vaguely historical elements without a unifying theme
- Multiple, competing features and focal points detract from the composition and entry
- Garage form and door are the largest facade features; garage door lacks architectural character

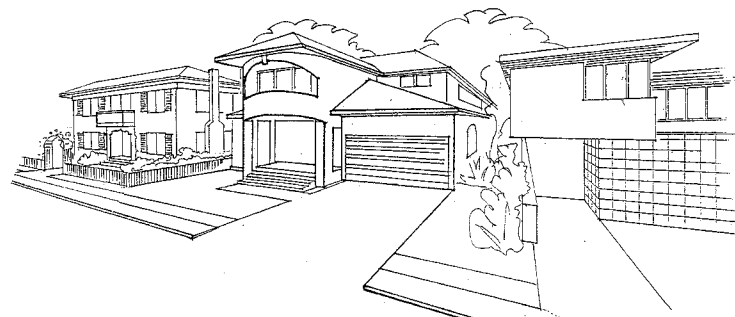


4C: Does NOT meet guideline



Inappropriate front and street-side facade

- Short side elevation faces street with formless wall
- Entry pavilion does not add to the facade design; appears tacked-on
- Shape, proportion, and composition of windows visually, stylistically chaotic



4E: Does NOT meet guideline



Inappropriate facade and entry

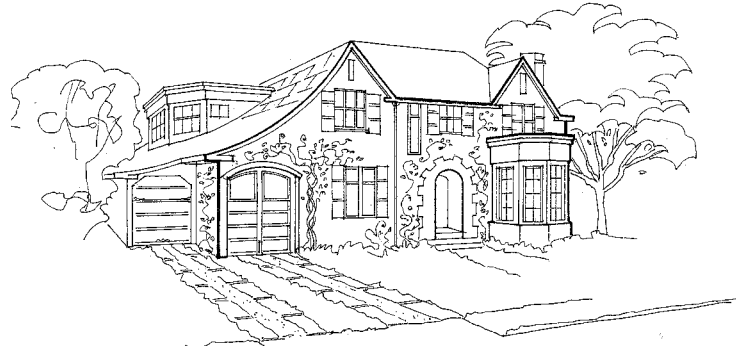
- Ambiguous, tentative facade composition is neither modern nor traditional
- Focal point of the facade is an overbearing two-story volume
- Garage is generic, unnecessarily prominent appendage to tower form

Key Points

Facades & Entries

Appropriate facade and entry design

- Accurate use of a known architectural style unifies the façade
- Well-composed, stately façade; entry is a simple but carefully detailed void in wall
- Using two staggered garage doors reduces garages' scale and prominence



4B: Does meet guideline



Appropriate front and street-side facade

- Design acknowledges the corner location with two composed building sides
- Entry feature is integral to the façade, humanly scaled, and richly detailed
- Windows, although varied, relate stylistically and proportionately as a “family of windows;” detailing reinforces building character

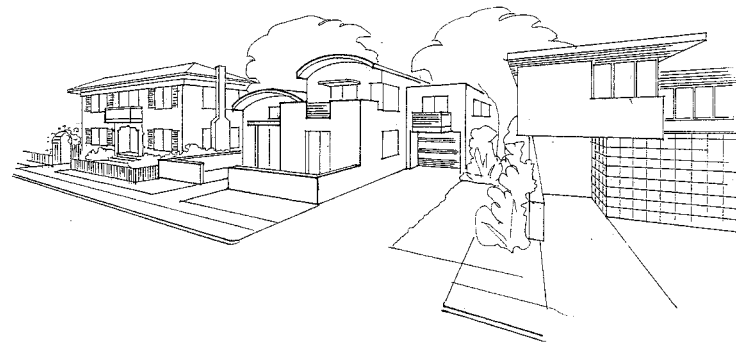


4D: Does meet guideline



Appropriate facade and entry

- Visual character created by the carefully stepped massing of modern architectural forms
- Refined entry sequence defined by garden walls leading to front door at lower vaulted form
- Subdued presence of garage improves side facade visible from street



4F: Does meet guideline



1. New facades and additions should have a unified visual character, not a collection of fragmented forms and elements. Give special attention to elevations on the side of the house and corners that may be highly visible from the street.
2. When composing facades, employ a clear use of line, order, hierarchy, and stylistically consistent windows, and give attention to proportion and adequate spacing between visual focal points.
3. To add visual interest and character to the design, incorporate architecturally distinctive eaves, window patterns, shapes or groupings and use of materials.
4. Avoid using over-scaled or monumental entries that aggressively stand out on the house or in relationship to other houses in the neighborhood due to size, height or vertical proportion. Where there is a prevailing neighborhood pattern for an entry type, such as front porches or entry courts, that entry type should be considered for the design.
5. Design garages, garage door openings and door panels to be modest in scale and architecturally integrated with the home, when garages are visible from the street.

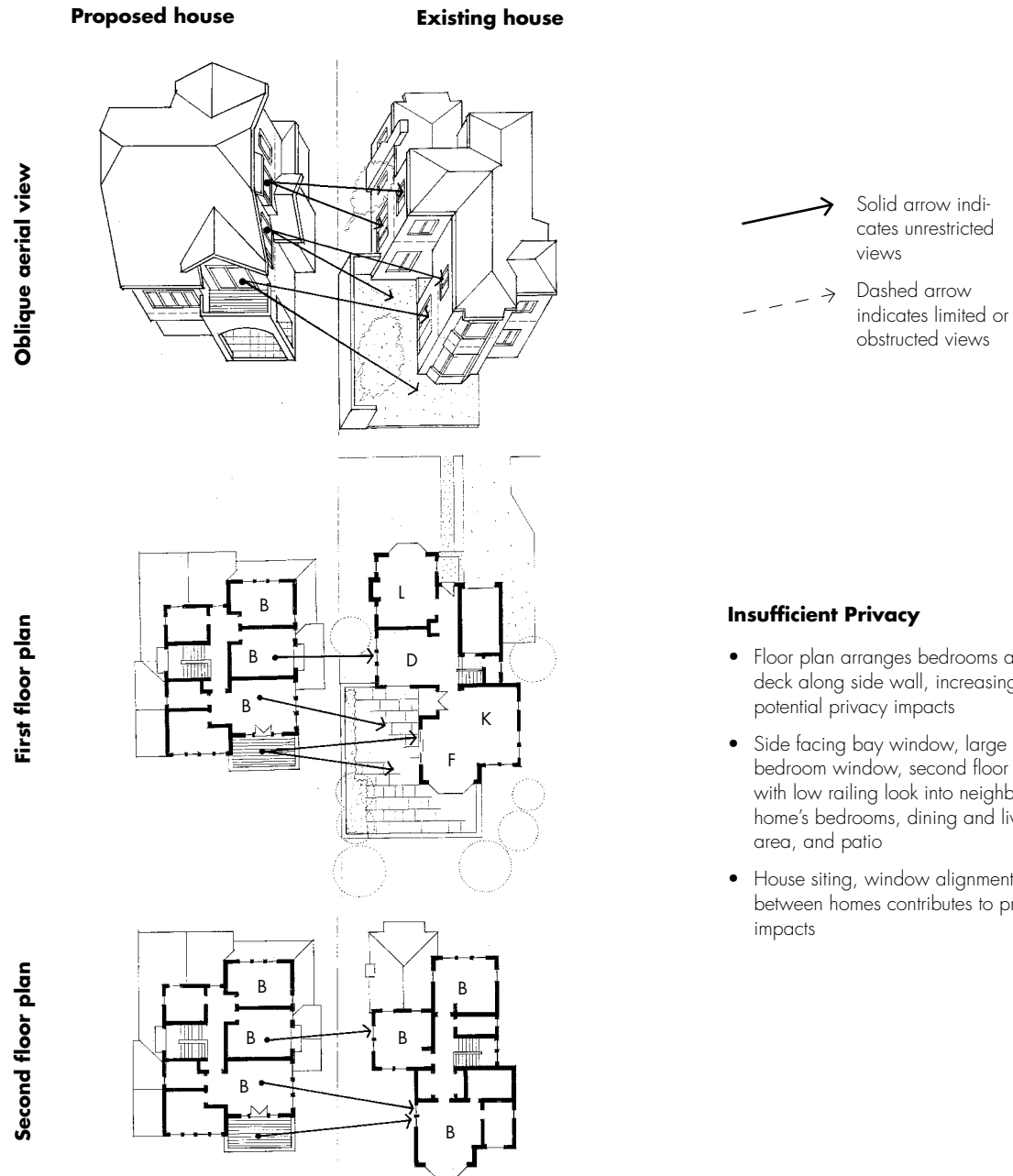
Guideline Five

Placement of Second Story Windows and Decks for Privacy*

Approval Criterion:

The size, placement and orientation of second story windows and decks shall limit direct sight lines into windows and patios located at the rear and sides of adjacent properties in close proximity.

* Complete privacy is not a realistic expectation. Designs should reduce opportunities for individuals to be casually observed by others and minimize intrusions upon pre-existing privacy situations, such as the main outdoor living area or primary patio.



Insufficient Privacy

- Floor plan arranges bedrooms and deck along side wall, increasing potential privacy impacts
- Side facing bay window, large master bedroom window, second floor deck with low railing look into neighboring home's bedrooms, dining and living area, and patio
- House siting, window alignment between homes contributes to privacy impacts

5A: Does NOT meet guideline



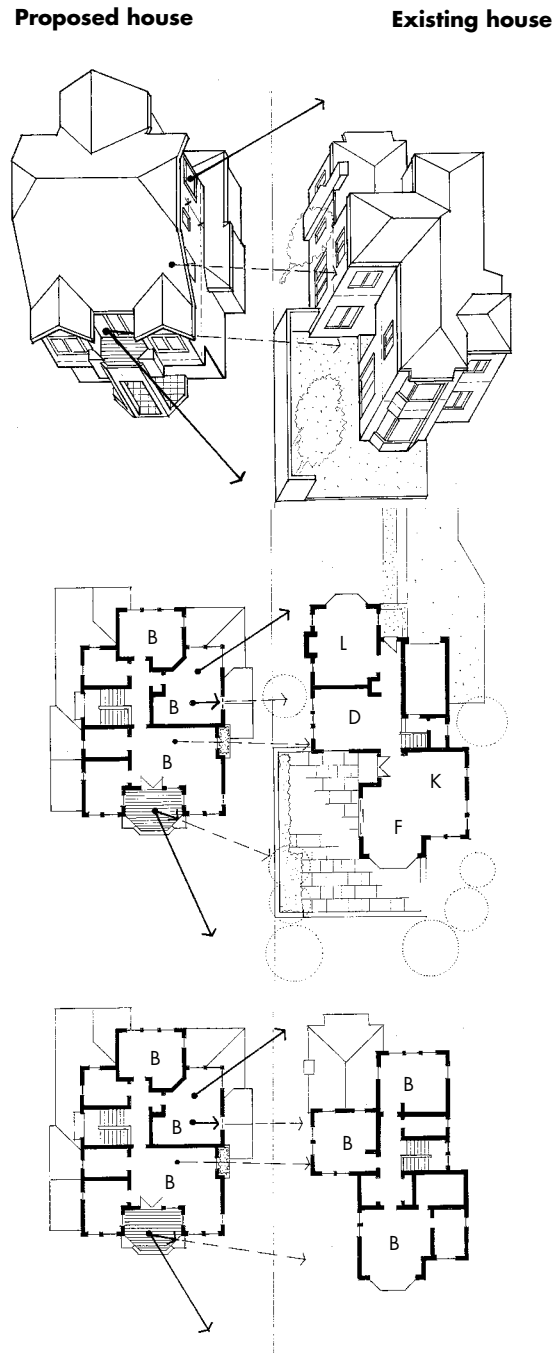
Key Points

Windows & Decks

- Solid arrow indicates unrestricted views
- - - → Dashed arrow indicates limited or obstructed views

Sufficient Privacy

- Floor plan adjustments relocate windows and rear deck away from side lot line; site plan adjustment (house slid forward) reduces window alignment
- Corner windows, narrow recessed windows, and high sill levels improve privacy
- Deck tucked into building form; angled shape and visual screening improve privacy



Oblique aerial view

First floor plan

Second floor plan

1. Gather information on neighboring homes and yards and locate potential privacy-sensitive areas on your site plan before you design.
2. Design the house to mitigate possible privacy impacts by providing non-transparent glazing, significant landscaping, permanent architectural screens or sufficient distance between houses. When necessary to achieve greater privacy, re-orient the direction of windows or decks or adjust window size or sill height.
3. Avoid windowless building walls, especially walls visible from the street. Use smaller upper floor windows and/or selective glazing at privacy sensitive locations. Windows may still remain operable, particularly for ventilation for bathrooms and egress for bedrooms.
4. Second story decks are permitted only to the extent that they result in minimal loss of privacy to side or rear facing properties. Deck size and potential use may be considered in determining potential loss of privacy.

5B: Does meet guideline

