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CHAPTER 2 – NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

OVERALL CONCEPT

Developing an understanding of the physical and visual characteristics of the neighborhood and identification of opportunities to preserve and enhance the character of a neighborhood should be the first step in the design process. This understanding and identification should become the foundation for any proposed additions and new structures.

SUMMERLAND HISTORY AND CHARACTER¹

The overriding purpose of these guidelines is to provide guidance to an applicant on locally appropriate architectural and landscape design concepts to ensure that a project will complement the character of Summerland. Summerland's character is a product of Summerland's location and the events and surviving elements of its past. To better understand Summerland, it helps to think of this character as having three aspects: natural, historical, and cultural.

SUMMERLAND'S NATURAL CHARACTER

Summerland's defining natural attribute is its bluff top location next to the Pacific Ocean, overlooking the Santa Barbara Channel. From this setting above the beach on three steep south facing hillsides, Summerlanders enjoy impressive coastal and ocean views. This exposes the seaside community to the ocean's marine influence, at times bringing hazy and humid weather, days of persistent fog, or moderate temperatures that are comfortably cooler on hot days and warmer on cold days. Winters and springs can be especially clear and warm, when the sun, brightly reflected in the Santa Barbara Channel, arcs low above the southern horizon and distant Channel Islands.

Summerland shares its series of broad knolls with congested US Highway 101 and the busy Union Pacific railroad tracks. In no small way, the noise and pollution from both can affect the natural ambiance here. At the same time, this stretch of 101 offers countless commuters and travelers sweeping views of the coastline, the community and the Santa Ynez Mountains beyond.

Although the area is now dominated by tiers of tightly packed houses, pavement and commercialization, Summerland's natural character persists in its elevated seaside location, sandy shore and bluffs, two coastal canyons and the Pacific's marine influence.

¹ Summerland's Character Description written by Summerland Planning Advisory Committee Member Mr. Reeve Woolpert.

HISTORICAL CHARACTER

In historic times, Summerland was first promoted as a spiritualist colony and a place for folks seeking a healthful retreat. The community was subdivided into 25 feet wide by 60 feet deep lots to accommodate members' tents. This peaceful makeshift haven was soon interrupted by the discovery of oil and gas, and subsequent intense industrialization of the shoreline and coastal terrace. Oil development caused a tremendous transformation of the area, substantially altering its character with widespread oil piers, beach and bluff top oil facilities, warehouses, businesses and new homes replacing old tents. For a while Summerland was a rough and ready boom town.

Before long, petroleum supplies and related fortunes faded along with most of the remaining tents, mystics and mediums, and for decades Summerland was a humble rural seaside train stop between Carpinteria and Santa Barbara: charming and rustic enough, though, for some early westerns to be filmed here.

The Yater and White Owl surf shops were a central attraction of the 1960's. Summerland slowly grew with little outside influence and government regulation into a kind of alternative beach-surfer-hippie town, just as the lower areas fronting the ocean were paved over and practically wiped out by a widened, elevated Highway 101. Substantial removal and rearrangement of homes, businesses and streets took place, and the community was disconnected from its prized seashore. Few other coastal towns have faced such blunt alteration.

For a decade, threatened by a water shortage, Summerland experienced a building moratorium. For many years prior to the moratorium, it had been difficult to get good construction loans for Summerland properties. This state of little change and calm suddenly ended in mid-1980 when the Summerland Water Board began releasing water to over 130 new meters. Less than two years later came another release of about 100 meters. An extraordinary building boom began that local citizens feared would nearly double Summerland's size without the aid of effective local planning policies. As broad fields of mustard, horse pastures and acres of open space began disappearing, citizens scrambled for Santa Barbara County's attention and help. Planning meetings and work shops that followed resulted in Summerland's first community plan and strengthened development guidelines.

No historic period since has notably shaped Summerland's evolving eclectic character. For a decade or so now, the focus seems to be to "clean the place up" and to "preserve, protect, and enhance" Summerland's charm as new, bigger homes and businesses replace smaller, older ones.

CULTURAL CHARACTER

From a distance, Summerland is relatively well defined. Its boundaries are delineated rather clearly. Within them is an urban pattern of narrow streets, small scale buildings and relaxed landscaping on former tent lots. Casual, low key and quaint beach town residential areas merge with upscale cafés, antique shops and other commercial development in the

business corridor along the base of two of the hillsides. Surrounding areas comfortably sprawl outward on rural sized, contemporary styled properties. The ocean bluffs are a mellow, humble place where a limited number of modest homes coexist comfortably with popular recreational areas and naturalness. A post office serves as the hub of the community.

Summerland is valued for its small town character, coastal resources and recreational areas, and great views. Its eclectic charm is derived from a range of influences. Architecture and landscaping consistent with this character help convey a sense of local identity. Such design respects, complements and strengthens the community of Summerland.

NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER

The character of a neighborhood is evaluated through an understanding of the "Broader Context" and the "Immediate Context" of the area surrounding the proposed project. Context is influenced by lot sizes, block patterns and block face character. These elements of a neighborhood shape the character of a block.

E. — SCALE AND ORIENTATION

Residential development within the ~~The commercial and u~~Urban residential areas of Summerland ~~are is~~ diverse in style, unimposing and small in scale. The scale of a proposal in relation to both the size of the site and the scale of the neighborhood ~~and community~~ is an important consideration. An applicant should visualize his or her project from different areas within the neighborhood and also from higher and lower elevations within the ~~community neighborhood in order to fully understand the Broader and Immediate Context of the project. The treatment of large surfaces, landscaping, grading and retaining walls should be compatible with a small scale community and should respect the grid orientation of Summerland.~~

Residential development within the Rural area is located on larger properties ~~(i.e., 5 acres or greater),~~ diverse topography and various land uses. New residential structures or additions to existing structures should respect the rural character and natural beauty of the area. Applicants should view the project site from various areas within the community to better understand the visibility of a proposed project and identification of riparian corridors. Identification of these important elements will assist the applicant and designer early in the Site Design stage of the project.

THE BROADER CONTEXT

The Broader Context considers how the building relates to the character and scale created by the collection of other buildings in the general vicinity. The buildings on both sides of the street (where applicable) in which the project is located are particularly relevant.

In addition to the immediate neighborhood, changes in physical and natural elements can define a broader neighborhood context. The descriptions of distinct neighborhoods are useful for determining how a new home or remodel can integrate into the setting by understanding subtle differences between different areas of Summerland.

These differences can include the following elements:

- Land Use: Changes in housing density, zoning, lot size, and public services such as sewer versus septic.
- Streets and Streetscapes: Presence of wide streets or main traffic routes, the predominance of private versus public roads, or if homes and front yard landscaping are visible from the street.
- Topographic/Natural Features: Proximity to open space, a riparian corridor or arroyo, or significant changes in topography.

THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT

The Immediate Context considers how the building relates to adjacent buildings or, in the case of an enlargement, how the addition relates to the existing structure and how the form of the new or **enlarged/**altered building impacts the adjacent buildings.

Figure X – Broader versus Immediate Context (Urban & Rural-need new graphic)

URBAN AREA

The Urban area of Summerland contains multi and single family residential development located in close proximity to each other. Variables such as lot and block patterns, block face character, and mixed and visual character play an important role in understanding a neighborhood and determining the appropriate building scale, mass and other site design elements such as landscaping, parking and hardscape.

Lot Pattern - As noted above, Summerland was originally developed with small "tent" lots that were typically 25 feet by 60 feet and many have been merged together over the years to provide larger lots more suitable for development. The original tent lot subdivision is located within the Urban area of Summerland. The recognition of the origins of Summerland are important considerations in design. Figure X illustrates the lot configuration patterns for Summerland.

Figure X – Lot Configuration Patterns (Urban Area)

Block Pattern - Buildings are generally one piece of a larger block that helps to define the main streets and pedestrian realm. The proximity and mass, bulk and scale of buildings to the sidewalk and street establishes the rhythm of the block. This establishes the public pedestrian environment. Service functions such as driveways, garages, trash collection and utilities can detract from this environment.

Block Face Character - Block face character refers to the common patterns and rhythms of buildings along the street for the length of the block. When evaluating a project's compatibility with the neighborhood, the adjacent buildings and those found across the street are taken into consideration. Depending on the issues relevant to a particular project, it may be appropriate to consider more than just the block face, but the larger neighborhood context as well.

This especially applies to through parcels that contain frontage on two or more streets. A sudden change in the building pattern can be visually disruptive. Development or renovation must build on the common rhythms and elements of architectural expression found in the Urban and Rural areas of Summerland.

New buildings should build upon the positive elements of the existing surrounding buildings. "Positive" elements are to be interpreted as those consistent with the concepts encouraged in these Design Guidelines.

Defined Visual Character - Some blocks are comprised of a strong visual character defined by buildings with compatible siting, form, proportions, texture and architectural details. On other blocks, building forms and architectural character are more varied, yet the buildings still have a unified character. In these situations, new buildings and renovations changing the design of a structure must be designed to be compatible with the preferred scale, patterns and architectural features of surrounding buildings, drawing from elements that are common to the block.

Mixed Visual Character - Other blocks do not have an apparent overriding visual character, or the character may be mixed or changing. When no clear pattern is evident on a block, a designer has a greater opportunity and responsibility to help define, unify, and contribute positively to the existing visual context. The design and architecture of a project should draw on the best features of surrounding buildings. Existing incompatible or poorly designed buildings on the block do not free the designer from the obligation to enhance the area through sensitive development and quality design.

RURAL AREA

The Rural area contains larger lots, varied topography, agriculture and riparian corridors. When considering a residential project, applicants should look at use aerial images to illustrate building locations, setbacks, vegetation and riparian areas. This will assist in determining the building site, appropriate setbacks, and potential screening methods to reduce the visibility of the proposed project.

NEIGHBORHOOD CHARACTER GUIDELINES

2-1 Photos illustrating the Broader Context and Immediate Context should be included with the proposed plans.

- 2-2 In areas with a defined visual character, building design should be compatible with the patterns and architectural features of surrounding buildings.
- 2-3 In areas with a mixed visual character, building design should help define, unify and contribute positively to the existing visual context while respecting the eclectic charm of the community.
- 2-4 **Urban** - Ensure that the project is compatible with other structures in its vicinity in terms of size, bulk, height, scale, quality of architectural design, and landscaping. Reference Conceptual and SBAR submittal requirements.
- 2-5 **Urban** - Photos illustrating the Block Face and Architectural Character of the neighbor should be included with the proposed plans. Projects on through lots should provide photos of both sides of the block.
- 2-6 **Urban** - Development or development considering the merger of lots resulting in a width of 50 feet or more should provide variation in the facade consistent with Chapter 4, Building Scale and Form, at approximately 25-foot intervals with a minimum facade setback of 6 feet.
- 2-7 **Rural** – Site buildings to respect the topography and rural character of the area. This may result in generous setbacks from roadways, topographic features, and other natural elements.
- 2-8 **Rural** – Orient buildings to allow for wildlife movement and access to water sources.