

October, 2005
PLANNING DIVISION

DESIGNING NEIGHBOURLY HOMES

GUIDELINES FOR BUILDING SCHEMES AND RESIDENTIAL CHARACTER STUDIES / STATEMENTS

The City of Surrey promotes quality single family housing construction and wants to ensure that new single family subdivisions are compatible with the character of the neighbourhood that surrounds them. The City promotes these objectives by using Building Schemes based on Residential Character Studies or Residential Character Statements. The following policies are included in the Building Scheme requirement:

1. The applicant is required to hire a Design Consultant early in the development application process to formulate design guidelines for the proposed subdivision. The formulation of the design guidelines must be based on either a Residential Character Study or Residential Character Statement of adjacent neighbourhoods. The guidelines will be consolidated and documented in a Building Scheme and will be registered on the land proposed for subdivision.
2. The Design Consultant is expected to present the results of the Residential Character Study or Residential Character Statement and proposed Building Design Guidelines to Council and if applicable, at the Public Hearing. Modifications to the guidelines may be required to address Council's and/or public concerns before final project approval.
3. The applicant will retain the Design Consultant following project approval to review and certify that individual plans achieve the intent stipulated in the guidelines.

Creativity and flexibility are encouraged in designing new subdivisions. The applicant and the Design Consultant are expected to provide appropriate solutions and demonstrate how new designs will affect the existing area.

Residential Character Studies

The intent of a Residential Character Study is to determine the general character of the existing residential neighbourhood. The study must identify the common design and construction elements of the existing neighbourhood to form the basis of the Building Scheme for the new subdivision.

Scope and Contents

The Study Area should be adjacent to the proposed subdivision property and be large enough to determine the character of adjacent areas. While it is impossible to set a standard size for the Study Area, it should cover at least one long City block (200 m) in all directions from the boundaries of the subject site.

The residential character of the existing neighbourhood includes certain design and construction elements, such as: sizes of the existing homes, styles and massing, roof forms and materials, exterior finishes, trims, garages, colour and other exterior design features and landscaping, which are common in the neighbourhood. The existence of mature trees and tree coverage, which contributes to the significance of the residential character, should also be identified and appropriate design and siting solutions should be considered to preserve this character. The Study should contain continuous street front photographs showing the existing buildings and streetscape and should provide the following information:

1. General description of the appearance and character of the existing neighbourhood.
2. Common design and construction elements that are characteristic of the neighbourhood.
3. Assessments of the neighbourhood character and the common design and construction elements to determine which common elements should be retained and which ones should be discontinued in the proposed subdivision.
4. Identification of any design issues and solutions, which are unique in the area. This may include transitional treatment among buildings with significantly different sizes, forms and styles, an opportunity to create a new character in the area and significant tree coverage and landscaping, etc.
5. Design guidelines for the subject site that integrates new building construction within the existing neighbourhood, including transitional treatments, landscape treatments and other design solutions to minimize the visual impact on the existing neighbourhood. It is advisable to provide sketches or elevation drawings to show how the new buildings would fit within the existing neighbourhood.

Residential Character Statements

A Residential Character Statement is an alternative to the Residential Character Study and may be used as a substitute under certain situations to form the basis of the Building Scheme. In order to determine whether a Residential Character Statement should be submitted instead of a full Residential Character Study the applicant and Design Consultant should provide the following information:

1. The applicant and Design Consultant should provide reasons, supported with photographs, of the surrounding areas and other relevant information to the planning staff for consideration.
2. Planning staff will review the request and decide which approach is appropriate for the project.
3. The Design Consultant will then prepare and submit either a Residential Character Statement or a Residential Character Study, as directed by staff, along with the Building Scheme.

A Residential Character Statement should be approximately two pages in length and include the following information:

1. A brief summary of the context of the area.
2. A brief summary of the existing building Schemes or design guidelines, if any, for the surrounding areas.
3. The general approach and basic design elements to be adopted in the proposed Building Scheme, including massing and/or design treatments of edge conditions.
4. Any other pertinent information the Design Consultant may wish to include.

A Residential Character Statement may be considered as a substitute for a full Residential Character Study for residential subdivisions, which include one or more of the following situations:

1. Small subdivisions, such as two lots, where the edge condition is insignificant.
2. Homogeneous area in which the character, which may or may not be desirable to repeat, is readily identified.
3. New area with virtually little or no residential development in the immediately surrounding areas.
4. Large area with newly approved subdivisions for which the character has been established by previously approved Building Schemes.
5. Subdivisions within a Neighbourhood Concept Plan (NCP) area with approved design guidelines.

Special Situations

The following situations may require special consideration due to the unique design aspects of the area:

1. Subdivision in a New Growth Area

In a new growth area where the residential character is not yet established, the Residential Character Study should identify this as an opportunity to create and set the design character in the area. The Study should indicate what character the new subdivision is to create and what design elements will contribute to the creation of the character. However, special transitional treatment should provide an appropriate interface between any existing homes and the new subdivision. A Residential Character Statement may be considered appropriate if the new area has virtually little or no residential development in the immediately surrounding areas.

2. Subdivision in an Existing Area with Incompatible Building Styles

If an existing area is dominated by large homes on small lots or similar building styles unsuitable to the community, or if the applicant and the Design Consultant do not want to repeat the existing character and would like to create a subdivision with improvements in design and construction quality, the Residential Character Study should document the existence of incompatible design and construction elements which are not to be repeated in the new subdivision and it should detail what design quality and features the new subdivision is to achieve.

3. Small Infill Subdivision

In a small infill subdivision for 5 lots or less, surrounded by existing homes, the Residential Character Study is important to ensure the new buildings will be compatible with existing ones. In these situations special attention should be given to house sizes, house styles, roof forms and materials, exterior finishes, colour and landscaping to ensure compatibility within the neighbourhood. It is inappropriate to set a new character in infill situations unless it is an example of the situations described in number 2 above. A Residential Character Statement may be considered appropriate for a small subdivision, such as a two-lot split, where edge conditions are insignificant.

4. Large Subdivision in an Existing Area

In a large subdivision within or adjacent to existing neighbourhoods, the applicant and the Design Consultant should pay attention to the character of existing neighbourhoods and appropriate design guidelines should be formulated to ensure design compatibility. However, there may be an opportunity for the applicant and the Design Consultant to introduce innovative designs and create a new character to further enhance the quality of the new homes within the interior portion of the site. In this situation, the specific design solutions should demonstrate the gradual transition from the existing residential character to the new desired character.

Building Design Guidelines and Building Scheme

An integral part of the Residential Character Study or Residential Character Statement is the formulation of design solutions. The design solutions should be translated into written design guidelines and supplemented with illustrations. Ultimately, a Building Scheme will be drafted and registered under Section 220 of the Land Title Act. A standard form for drafting a Building Scheme suggests the inclusion of certain design elements. A copy of the Standard Building Scheme is available from the Planning & Development Department. In order to ensure that the intent of the Building Scheme is well understood, the Design Consultant should include a summary of the character of the Building Scheme attempts to achieve and outline the important design elements or features that create or maintain the desired residential character. It would also be desirable to include the Building Scheme elevation examples of the proposed homes to be constructed in the new subdivision.