

## **Title 14:**

### Signal Mountain Design Review Commission

#### **Chapter 4: Design Principles and Standards.**

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#### 14-400 **Intent and Purpose**

##### 1. **Intent**

To create and maintain a comprehensive program of community beautification and improvement through its commercial buildings and properties by the establishment of guidelines for the development, construction, remodeling, or alteration of all non-single family residential property within the Town of Signal Mountain.

##### 2. **Purpose**

- a. To maintain and enhance the property values and taxable value of property in the Town.
- b. To maintain the Town as a predominantly single-family residential community by protecting the character and integrity of present and future residential areas from encroachment by non-compatible land uses.
- c. To maintain a balance among land uses within the Town by insuring that commercial, industrial and multi-family development do not impair the property values of single-family detached residential development within the Town.

#### 14-401 **General Information**

In the case of any ambiguity or apparent conflict between the requirements of the Signal Mountain Design Principles and Standards, the Zoning Ordinance or other codes, ordinances or regulations, the more restrictive requirement shall govern.

14-402      **Projects Subject to Review**

1. The following types of projects are subject to review by the Design Review Commission for all categories of construction except single-family residential detached structures regardless of the dollar value of the project:
  - a. New construction including site improvements and signage.
  - b. Moving a structure.
  - b. Demolition or change in use for land, buildings or buildings and land.
  - d. Planned Unit Developments.
2. The following types of improvements or repairs are subject to review by the Design Review Commission for all categories of construction except single-family residential detached structures where the gross area of the improvements or repairs exceeds twenty-five (25%) of the area of those same original improvements.
  - a. Alteration of Exterior Appearance not to include painting or re-roofing unless colors change.
    - (1) Example: If the area of exterior building repair or replacement exceeds 25% of the total surface area of the building (excluding flat roofs) then the project is subject to the Commission's review based on compliance with these Principles and Standards.
  - b. Paving:
    - (1) Example: If the area of paving repair in a parking lot exceeds 25% of the original area of site improvements (i.e. paving, sidewalks, landscaping, curb work, etc.) then the project would be subject to the Commission's review based on compliance with these Principles and Standards.
  - c. Landscaping.

14-403      **Definitions**

Appearance. The outward aspect visible to the public.

Applicant. The party whose has been assigned the rights by the Owner to seek

Approval from the Commission.

Appropriate. Sympathetic-fitting the context of the site and the whole community.

Attractive. Having qualities that arouse interest and pleasure in the observer.

Berm. A raised form of earth to provide screening or to improve the aesthetic character.

Compatibility. Harmony in the appearance of two or more external design features in the same vicinity.

Commission. The Signal Mountain Design Review Commission.

Council. The Signal Mountain Town Council.

Harmony. A quality that represents an appropriate and congruent arrangement of parts, as in an arrangement of varied architectural and landscape elements.

Landscaping. Plant materials, topography, and other natural physical elements combined in relation to one another and to man-made structures.

Owner. The term Owner shall refer to the party, which by rights and responsibilities conveyed through title, lease or rental agreement is charged with the responsibility of providing the improvements described in these Principles and Standards. In the absence of any agreement the Owner shall be defined as the person or entity that holds title to the land.

Proportion. The balanced relationship of parts of a building, landscape, structures, or buildings to each other and to the whole.

Public Amenity. An element, either natural or built, which is attractive and accessible to the public.

Scale. Proportional relationship of the size of parts to one another and to the human figure.

Siting. The process of placing a building and its related elements on a piece of property.

Sign.: Any device, fixture, placard or structure affixed to, supported by or suspended by a stationary object, building or the ground that uses any color, form, graphic, illumination, symbol or writing to communicate information of any kind or to attract the attention of the public.

Shall. The term "shall" as used in the Design Manual indicates a requirement for adherence to the noted guidelines.

Should. The term "should" as used in the Design Manual indicates a strong desire by the Commission to have the Owner incorporate the noted ideas into the project. While not a mandatory requirement the user is strongly encouraged to follow the guidelines and the Commission will look at the overall cooperation of the Owner in final approval of plans where latitude is granted.

Streetscape. The scene as may be observed along a public street or way composed of natural and man-made components, including buildings, paving, planting, street hardware, and miscellaneous structures.

Town. The Town of Signal Mountain.

14-404      **Appearance Criteria**

1.    **Site Design and Layout:** The relationship of a building to a site and the adjoining areas.
  - a. Site planning with setbacks and yards in excess of zoning restrictions is encouraged to provide an interesting relationship between buildings. Setbacks established as part of a Planned Unit Development (PUD) are also encouraged.
  - b. Parking areas shall be treated with decorative elements, such as building wall extensions, plantings, berms or other innovative means to enhance the appearance of parking areas.
  - c. Buildings and improvements on the site should be organized to minimize changes to existing topography and the loss of existing mature vegetation.
  - d. Smooth topographic transitions should be provided at the edges of properties. Slope of 1:3 (rise to run) or shallower are encouraged but in no case shall slopes be steeper than allowed by ordinance or regulation.
  - e. Adjacent buildings of different architectural styles shall be made compatible by such means as screens, sight breaks or similar materials.
  - f. Attractive landscape transition to, or buffers from, adjoining properties shall be provided.
2.    **Landscaping and Site Treatment:** The overall landscape design should complement and contribute to beauty and utility of the development.
  - a. Plant material shall be selected for its structure, texture, color, and its ultimate growth. Plants shall be hardy and harmonious to the design.
  - b. Where healthy plant material exists on a site prior to its development, the

Commission may allow credit for such plant material if such an adjustment is in keeping with the intent of these Standards and Principles and provided that the existing plant material remains protected and ecologically healthy after the construction process.

- c. In areas where general planting will not prosper, other materials such as fences, walls, and paving of wood, brick, stone, river gravel, and cobbles shall be used. Carefully selected plants shall be combined with such materials where possible. The Owner also has the option to use any of the above materials in combination with planting to achieve a good visual image where planting alone is noted in this section.
- d. The perimeter of parking areas, or other vehicular use areas, bordering public streets or adjacent property should consist of a planting area at least ten feet (10') in depth. Exceptions may be made if such areas are screened visually from an abutting right-of-way or adjacent property. Landscaping in these areas is to include one tree with a minimum caliper of 2 to 2 1/2 inches every twenty-five (25) linear feet or fraction thereof in combination with shrubbery.
- e. Off-street parking areas shall have at least five (5) square feet of interior landscaping for each parking space excluding those spaces abutting a landscaped perimeter or spaces that are directly served by an aisle abutting and running parallel to such a perimeter.
- f. As a general standard, there should be at least one tree, of at least 2-1/2" caliper, planted for each 300 sq. ft. of parking area islands. The total number of trees shall not be less than one tree every 50 linear feet or fraction thereof of required interior landscaped area.
- g. Shrubby should be used as a design element to transition from the vertical nature of trees or building elements to the horizontal portions of the site such as grass, paving and ground cover. Except for plants listed as "prostrate" type, the minimum spread of any shrubby shall be 18".
- h. Grass areas may be seeded, sprigged, plugged or sodded in all areas except solid sod shall be used in swales, slopes greater than 1:3 or other areas subject to erosion.
- i. Shrubby and ground covers shall be sized and spaced in a manner that will present a finished appearance with reasonably complete coverage, under normal growing conditions within one (1) year after planting.
- j. Where bark chips, mulch, pine needles or other non-living materials are used as a ground cover they shall be contained by use of perimeter curbing and properly sloped to prevent erosion.

3. **Plant Installation, Maintenance and Irrigation:**

- a. Continued maintenance of landscaped area is the responsibility of the property owner. Planting plans must be maintained as originally designed and approved. Any diseased, dying or dead plants should be treated or replaced by the property owner.
- b. Irrigation is strongly encouraged to ensure adequate moisture in planting areas. Irrigation systems must be installed below-ground, with spray heads flush with the ground surface where they might pose a safety hazard. Exposed heads may be used in planting areas or other areas remote from normal pedestrian access. Irrigation is not required where the Owner can demonstrate the proper use of vegetation found naturally in the native woods of Signal Mountain.
- c. When plant materials are installed, they shall be healthy plants installed according to accepted commercial planting procedures and maintained in a healthy condition.
- d. In locations where plants will be susceptible to injury by pedestrian or motor traffic, appropriate curbs, guards, barriers, or other devices shall protect them.
- e. Where planting cannot reasonably be accomplished before building occupancy the Owner shall furnish a bond or other acceptable guaranty equal to the cost of all site landscaping to the Town of Signal Mountain guaranteeing the installation at the first season when installation can reasonably be expected to produce healthy plants.

4. **Screening:** Screening may be accomplished by using fences and/or planting.

- a. Service yards, garbage collection areas, utility meters, heating and air-conditioning equipment, outside equipment storage, vending machines and other places that tend to be unsightly shall be screened by use of walls, fencing, planting, or combinations of these.
- b. Screening shall be equally effective in winter and summer.
- c. Opaque screening at least 6 feet in height shall enclose garbage collection areas. In the event that the collection areas enclose dumpsters or other equipment, the screening should be at least 2 feet taller than the equipment, and not less than 6 feet in height.
- d. The maximum heights of fences should generally be 6 feet, except for tennis court fences, which may be 10 feet and fencing at garbage collection areas. The use of chain link, plastic or wire fencing is not permitted for fences in yards abutting streets.

- e. Fences designed to create privacy or separations should be made of materials compatible with the designs of the building.
- f. Solid fences should not create a stockade appearance. The use of offsets and adjacent planting is encouraged. Fences facing streets shall have no more than forty (40) feet in a straight line unless appropriate landscaping treatment and/or design elements create unusual breaks to eliminate the straight-line appearance.
- g. Screening by plantings requires the use of evergreen plants to provide effective year round screening. Evergreen screening may be enriched with plants having seasonal color variation.
- h. When a berm is used to form a visual screen in lieu of, or in conjunction with other screening elements; such berm shall be completely covered with shrubs, grass or other living ground cover.
- i. Changes in elevation or earth berms may be used along the perimeter of parking areas to reinforce planting screens. The slope of earth should not exceed 1:3 rise to run, and should be densely planted with ground cover or shrubs to prevent erosion.

**5. Miscellaneous Landscaping Requirements:**

- a. All required landscaping, except planting covered by a bond or other acceptable guaranty, shall be in place prior to final inspection and approval by the Building Inspector. On site areas adjacent to streets and the front lawn areas must be established or be sodded prior to occupancy of the project.
- b. No landscaping element or similar item shall be installed or maintained in the vicinity of any corner, street, intersection or access way intersecting a public right-of way that, in the opinion of the Commission or Building Inspector is an obstruction to visibility or is a traffic hazard.
- c. Where site run-off requires detention areas, the areas should be attractively designed.

**6. Site Lighting:** Exterior lighting and building fixtures shall be of a design and size comparable with the building and adjacent areas.

Lighting shall be restrained to avoid excessive brightness. Site lighting in excess of 20-foot candles shall not be allowed except under canopies where motor fuels are dispensed, under covered walkways, for automated bank tellers or other similar uses that require a higher light level by a regulatory agency.

**7. Parking and Paved Areas:** The visual impact of parking areas should be subdued.

- a. Parking areas should be organized as a series of small parking bays with planted islands separating them. As a general guideline, no more than ten contiguous parking spaces are recommended.
- b. If, in the opinion of the Commission, bicycle traffic is anticipated parking facilities should be provided within commercial or retail areas. These facilities should not interfere with pedestrian movement.
- c. The bumper overhang of a vehicle may encroach upon any interior landscaped area when said area is at least three and one-half (3-1 1/2) feet in depth per abutting parking space and protected by wheel stops or curbing. Two (2) feet of said landscaping area may be part of the required depth of each abutting parking space.
- d. Preservation of existing healthy trees in parking areas is encouraged.
- e. Parking areas shall be paved with asphalt, concrete, or masonry materials. Asphalt shall not be used for paving sidewalks.

**14-405 Building Design**

1. While a diversity of architectural styles is encouraged, structures generally should be domestic in scale and be compatible with the character of the single-family community.
2. Lengthy unbroken facades should be avoided. As a general guide, the maximum horizontal length of an unbroken facade plane should be fifty (50) feet in residential districts, and seventy-five (75) feet in commercial and office districts. Facade offsets should be sufficient to create a strong shadow line.
3. Roofs should project beyond the facade. Flat roofs are discouraged, but if flat roofs are used a quality cornice line shall be used.

**14-406 Scale and Proportion of Building Elements**

1. Buildings and structures shall be designed based on accepted architectural principles for scale, mass, rhythm and proportion.
2. The height, width and proportions of a building should create a pleasing visual experience with the other buildings and open spaces in the immediate vicinity.
3. The height and width of roofs should project beyond the facade. Flat roofs are discouraged, but if flat roofs are used a quality cornice line shall be used. Building elements such as doors, windows and other openings shall have scale and proportions that are in harmony with the building yet create a strong human scale.

**14-407 Exterior Forms and Materials**

1. The Commission requires building materials that are lasting in quality, residential in scale, have good architectural character and appearance.
2. Durable grades of materials such as stone, brick, wood and stucco are preferred. Synthetic and imitation materials are generally considered inappropriate but may be approved on a case-by-case basis. EIFS Systems (proprietary names of "Sto" or "Drivit") are acceptable equals to stucco.
3. The use of windows and doors similar in appearance to those used in residential structures is encouraged. Large expanses of glass are discouraged unless it is broken up into smaller components by the use of window mullions.
4. Painted or factory finished metal should be used with great care and is normally only acceptable for windows, doors, roofs and trim preferably in non-metallic colors. Metal siding is generally considered unacceptable.
5. Plywood and hardboard siding should be avoided unless it is broken up into smaller components by the use of reveals, battens or other design features.
6. Large expanses of concrete shall be avoided unless the scale of the material is reduced through the use of offsets and texture.
7. The use of standard three-tab shingles are normally not acceptable but will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Dimensional asphalt/fiberglass shingles, cedar shakes, slate, or metal shingle or seam roofs are acceptable.

#### 14-408 **Building or Mounted Equipment**

1. All roof and building-mounted equipment such as air-conditioning units, exhaust fans, vents, satellite dishes, and other similar devices be fully screened from public view. Screening materials shall be of the same general character and compatible with the materials used for walls and roofs.
2. Building Lighting Requirements noted under Site Lighting shall also apply to building lighting.
3. The use of custom hardware, which is in character with the building development, is encouraged over the use of standard, prefab hardware. The use of custom enclosures is also encouraged.
  - a. Customized Hardware. Miscellaneous structures and hardware such as mailboxes, trash receptacles, benches, and grocery cart racks, bicycle racks, planting pots, etc. shall be designed to be part of the design concept for the building development.
  - b. Standard Hardware. It is recognized that some hardware such as newspaper

vending machines, ice machines and soft drink vending machines cannot be easily customized. However, unless properly screened or enclosed these types of devices shall be factory or field-painted with muted colors and have all backlighting covered or removed.

- c. Exceptions. Utility buildings used for the storage of equipment or supplies where the equipment or supply storage is not the primary function of the business may use metal building components and discard other paragraphs of the section of Building Design providing that the building is completely screened with berms or permanent evergreen vegetation and is not visible from any public access or private residence.

#### 14-409      **Signage**

Applicants are urged to study the Sign Regulations for specific requirements on sizes and dimensions, types, siting restrictions and other requirements. Signs in Signal Mountain are controlled in order to preserve and not detract from the natural surroundings of the community. For submittal requirements for signage see SM Code, Title 14, Chapter 5.

##### 1.      **Sign Types**

- a. Ground-mounted signs are to be integrated into the landscaping plan.
- b. Building directory signs should not be apparent from the street, but should be designed to direct people to individual tenants once they have reached the building.
- c. Signs mounted on buildings should be integrated with the architecture of the building, and generally should not project above or beyond the drip line of sloped roof buildings. They should be placed on the building background or other neutral surface and be located either above windows, adjacent to entry doors, or on surfaces such as fascias specifically designed for signage.
- d. Traffic directional signs should incorporate conventional instruction and symbols but should be integrated in form and character with other signage or landscape elements on the site. Standard painted steel "hat channel" posts are not acceptable. *Research to see if meets FED Standards.*
- e. Signs identifying miscellaneous structures and hardware as defined in Section 206 shall be displayed on the surface of the device in such a manner that they do not "shout" for attention. Where several similar devices are used such as newspaper vending machines the signage shall be consistent and uniform.

##### 2.      **Design Criteria**

- a. Signage should be consistent in size, material and location within each development. Signs should be designed as an architectural element of the building

and should reflect or compliment the architectural style of the building.

- b. Signs can consist of individual letters and numbers. The use of logos or some graphic elements may be permitted. Generally such graphic elements are restricted to no more than ten (10) percent of the sign area. Small signs (less than 12 square feet) may be monolithic particularly where the size and style of the framing adds richness to the final appearance.
- c. Illumination of signs, where permitted, should be shaded, shielded, subdued or directed so that the light intensity will not create glare or be objectionable to surrounding areas. Exposed bulbs are not allowed.
- d. Signs should not attract attention excessively. Specifically precluded are signs that are an imitation of traffic signals or may be confused with them; have moving parts; are changing, blinking, flashing or fluttering; have reflective materials, pulsating light or strobe lights or are beacons.
- e. Signs shall be self-supporting without the use of guy wires or unsightly bracing.

14-410

#### **Submittal Requirements**

1. Applicants are encouraged to submit preliminary information at the schematic design phase of a project to allow preliminary review before a large investment has been made in construction documents. Failure of the applicant to submit preliminary plans will not relieve him/her of compliance with requirements of the Design Standards. While the Commission will endeavor to make appropriate comments and recommendations at the preliminary phase, this early review will not eliminate the requirement for a final review and approval by the Commission prior to any construction.
2. Minimum final submission documentation. All illustrations shall be drawn scale.
3. New Construction, Remodeling and Renovation. Two sets of the following information shall be submitted to the Building Official at least eleven days prior to a regularly scheduled meeting of the Commission. The information shall be complete enough to illustrate all design information, dimensional data, and quality of materials, colors, and textures. Where remodeling or renovation is planned the unaffected items may be deleted from the submission if color photographs are provided indicating all present conditions:
  - a. Site Plan including topographic elevations and property improvements.
  - b. Site Landscaping Plan indicating all planting, screening, and fencing, etc.
  - c. Site Utility Plan indicating drainage, exterior lighting, and all utility services.
  - d. Exterior elevation drawings of all sides of the building.
  - e. Sample boards indicating materials, colors and textures of the exterior.
  - f. Garbage collection point and proposed screening.
  - g. Parking layout.

- h. Master Signage Plan. If the structure is a multi-tenant facility, a master sign plan shall be submitted indicating all proposed signs with locations, sizes, styles, and types of messages. The approved master sign plan will be the basis for approval of all subsequent tenant signs. Single-tenant buildings shall meet the signage submittal requirements of the Sign Regulations (Title 14, Chapter 5, 14-502).
- i. Floor plans (or similar drawings of exterior walls) in sufficient detail to indicate all perimeter offsets.
- j. Construction manuals or specifications where detailed information is not indicated in other documents.
- k. Vicinity plan indicating buildings in adjacent lots with photographs of those structures.

**NOTE:** It is the intent of the Commission to review the applicant's information promptly. However, the Commission review and approval is only one step in the construction process. In no case may construction start without all required regulatory agency permits and approvals including a building permit from the Town of Signal Mountain.

#### 14-411 **Appeals Process**

Applicants whose plans are conditionally approved or are disapproved by the Commission may appeal the Commission's action to the Town Council. Appeals to the Council shall be filed with the Town Manager ten (10) days prior to the next regular meeting of the Council not more than sixty (60) days after the date of the Commission's action. The members of the Commission will be notified of the appeals request and will be given the opportunity to address the Council. The Council, after hearing all parties who desire to be heard, shall approve, approve with conditions, or not approve the application by a written statement setting forth the reasons for its action. If the Council approves or conditionally approves the application, the Building Official may issue the building permit forthwith provided that the applicant has complied with the terms of approval or conditional approval; with other provisions of this section, and with all other codes, ordinances, regulations and procedures regarding building permits.

#### 14-412 **Project Development Contract**

A project development contract incorporating, among other elements, any conditions or requirements imposed on the applicant pursuant to this chapter, must be executed by and between the Commission and the applicant or, when appealed and approved, between the Council and the applicant before a building permit can be issued for any development outlining the requirements in writing, in addition to any drawings or sketches.

Copies of the Project Development Contract to be executed after Commission or Council approval of the project are available from the Town office.