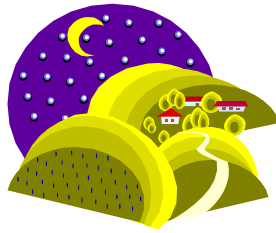


# CITY OF SAN RAFAEL Community Development Department

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# HILLSIDE GUIDELINES

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## Introduction

This handout about San Rafael's hillside overlay district has been prepared as a guide to the homeowner. It summarizes San Rafael's zoning regulations and construction requirements on single-family hillside lots.

Prior to submittal of plans, it is recommended that the applicant visit the planning division and discuss their proposed project with a planner.

## What constitutes a Hillside Lot?

All lots with an average slope greater than twenty-five percent (25%), or lots in the Hillside Overlay District, in the hillside resource residential, hillside residential or low-density general plan land use districts.

## Objectives

The goals and policies of the San Rafael general plan and adopted specific plans and neighborhood plans, seek to protect public health and safety by minimizing hazards, including seismic and landslide risks, soil erosion, and fire danger associated with development on steep and/or unstable slopes. Additionally, plan policies encourage preservation of natural hillside features and the development of hillside site design standards. The standards for the design of subdivisions on slopes over twenty-five percent (25%) are intended to implement these objectives by requiring that lots in hillside subdivisions realistically relate to the natural topography of the land by limiting grading and retaining much of

the natural terrain. The standards also implement plan policies by relating density to site constraints and to city design policies. Additionally, in the case of substandard streets, these provisions seek to assure adequate emergency access by providing additional on-site parking.

## Property development standards (-H)

Development standards shall be those of the underlying zoning district with which a hillside development overlay district is combined, provided that the following shall be in addition and shall govern where conflicts arise, except for subsection (G), Lot Standards, where the lot size standard of the underlying zoning district applies when more restrictive than the subdivision ordinance. (See also last page).

- A. Building Stepback. A building stepback is established to limit the height of structures to avoid excessive building bulk. On the downhill slope, walls and on walls facing front and side property lines, a twenty-foot (20') height limit measured from existing grade shall be observed within all areas within fifteen feet (15') of the maximum building envelope limit. To allow for design flexibility, an encroachment into the street front, street side and interior side stepback is permitted along twenty-five percent (25%) of the building length. See Figures at right.

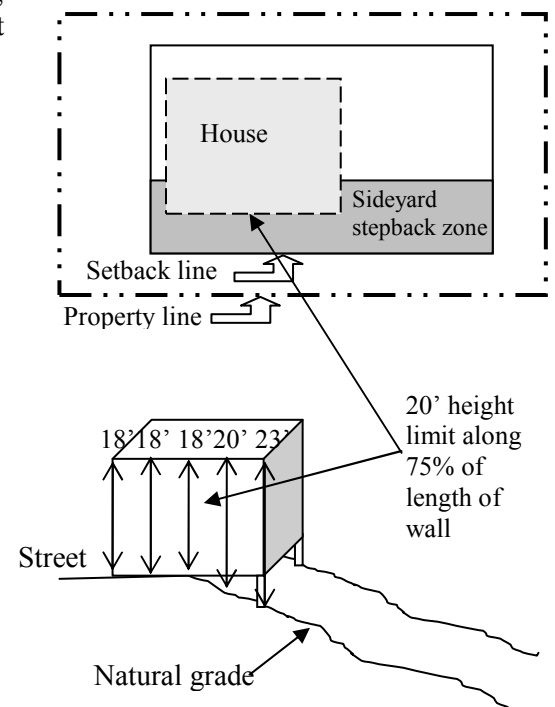
## For More Information:

**Planning Division:** 485-3085 or in person at City Hall, 1400 Fifth Avenue, 3rd floor. Zoning requirements and permit applications.

**Building Division:** 485-3367 Building Code, and Building, Electrical and Plumbing Permits.

**Fire Department:** 485-3308 Fire prevention, fire safe landscaping, vegetation management, and hazardous materials.

**Public Works Dept.:** 485-3355 Construction in the public right-of-way (such as streets and sidewalks), street maintenance, drainage, sewers, easements, and City trees.



B. Setbacks. (See *Development Standards at a Glance*)

C. Natural State (NS). A minimum area of twenty-five percent (25%) of the lot area plus the percentage figure of average slope, not to exceed a maximum of eighty-five percent (85%), must remain in its NS. This standard may be waived or reduced for lots zoned PD (planned district) with the recommendation of the design review board, subject to approval by the hearing body. (See *Development Standards at a Glance* for definition of NS)

D. Gross Building Square Footage. The maximum permitted gross building square footage of all structures (including garages and accessory structures over one hundred twenty (120) square feet) is limited to two thousand five hundred (2,500) square feet plus ten percent (10%) of the lot area with the maximum gross square footage set at six thousand five hundred (6,500) square feet.

E. Ridgeline Development. Development of new structures within one hundred (100) vertical feet of a visually significant ridgeline, as shown on community design map A of the general plan, is prohibited unless this restriction precludes all reasonable economic use of the property. Exception: An exception to the ridgeline regulation may be granted if the decision-making body makes the findings that:

1. There are no site development alternatives which avoid ridgeline development; and,
2. The density has been reduced to the minimum allowed by the general plan land use designation density range; and,
3. No new subdivision lots

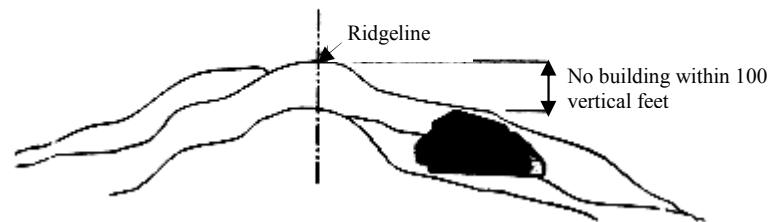
are created which will result in ridgeline development; and,

4. The proposed development will not have significant adverse visual impacts due to modifications for height, bulk, design, size, location, siting and landscaping which avoid or minimize the visual impacts of the development as viewed from all public viewing areas.

for conformity with the Hillside Residential Design Guidelines Manual.

**Exceptions to property development standards**  
 Exceptions to the property development standards may be approved by the city council, upon the recommendation of the design review board and the

*Illustration of ridgeline home standards*



F. Parking requirements. On streets less than twenty-six (26) feet wide, a minimum of two additional on-site parking spaces shall be provided (not on the driveway apron) per unit. These spaces should be conveniently placed relative to the dwelling unit which they serve. This requirement may be waived or reduced by the hearing body when the size or shape of the lot or the need for excessive grading or tree removal make the requirement infeasible.

G. Lot Standards. Minimum lot sizes and widths for lots created after November 21, 1991 are subject to the slope tables established under Chapter 15.34 of the subdivision ordinance. *See last page.*

H. Design Review Requirement. An environmental and design review permit may be required, consistent with the requirements of Chapter 14.25, of the Zoning Ordinance. All applications shall be evaluated

planning commission, when the applicant has demonstrated that alternative design concepts carry out the objectives of this chapter of the general plan based on the following criteria:

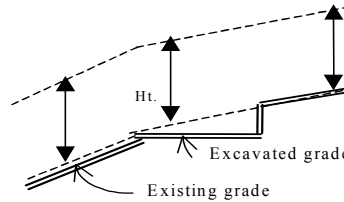
1. The project design alternative meets the stated objectives of the hillside design guidelines to preserve the inherent characteristics of hillside sites, display sensitivity to the natural hillside setting and compatibility with nearby hillside neighborhoods, and maintain a strong relationship to the natural setting; and
2. Alternative design solutions which minimize grading, retain more of the project site in its natural state, minimize visual impacts, protect significant trees, or protect natural resources result in a demonstrably superior project with greater sensitivity to the natural setting and compatibility with and sensitivity to nearby structures.

**DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS AT A GLANCE:**

**Floor Area Ratio (FAR) and maximum square footage** 10% of lot area plus 2,500 square feet. 6,500 square feet absolute maximum

**Height of Structures** 30 feet for dwelling, 15 feet for accessory structures

**Height Measurements** On a lot with a slope over 25%, height is measured vertically from the existing grade to the uppermost point of the roof edge or other feature perpendicular to that grade.



**Natural State** All land and water that remains undeveloped and undisturbed. This means that grading, excavating, filling, and/or the construction of roadways, driveways, parking areas and structures are prohibited. Incidental minor grading for hiking trails, bicycle paths, equestrian trails, picnic areas and planting and landscaping which is in addition to and enhances the natural environment are permitted.

**Setback Waivers** Structures may encroach into a required yard or setback for a distance of not more than one-half (1/2) of the required yard or setback with the recommendation of the design review board that the decrease minimizes the impact of hillside development and grading and a compensating increase in setback is required in the opposing setback.

**Average Slope Calculation** For a quick estimate of the average slope of a lot, use this method:  
(The highest point of the lot) - (the lowest point of the lot)  
 Lot depth

For example:  $\frac{263' - 217'}{150'} = \frac{46'}{150'} = 30.6\%$  slope

The most accurate measurement of the slope of a lot before grading is determined by this formula:

$\frac{(.00229)(I)(L)}{(A)}$	.00229 is the conversion factor for square feet "I" is the contour interval in feet "L" is the sum of the length of the contour lines in feet "A" is the size of the lot in acres
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**Tree Replacement** Three trees shall be planted for every significant tree removed. Significant tree: oaks that measure six inches in diameter and other trees that measure 12 inches in diameter at four and a half feet above the root crown.

**SUBDIVISION LOT DESIGN STANDARDS:**

The standards listed below shall be utilized to evaluate the lot configuration of all applications proposed in hillside areas where slopes are over twenty-five percent (25%). In addition to the Zoning Ordinance requirements in effect in the area, any lot created after 1989 shall meet the density criteria and contain at least the minimum lot width and area, as related to the applicable San Rafael general plan land

use plan designation and its natural topographical slope as set forth in the following tables. Lower densities and larger lot sizes may be required where potentially hazardous conditions or special natural features occur or, where development would be highly visible to the neighborhood or community. In no instance can the density exceed that allowed by the zoning district.

Table 15.07.020A  
 HILLSIDE RESOURCE RESIDENTIAL LAND USE DESIGNATION  
 (0.1-0.5 units per gross acre)

Percent of slope	Dwelling Unit Per Gross Acre	Min. Lot Size	Avg. Lot Width
0-10	.5	2 acres	150 feet
10-20	.4	2 acres	150 feet
20-30	.33	2 acres	150 feet
30-40	.25	2 acres	150 feet
Over 40	.2	2 acres	150 feet



Table 15.07.020B  
 HILLSIDE RESIDENTIAL LAND USE DESIGNATION  
 (0.5-2.0 units per gross acre)

Percent of slope	Dwelling Unit Per Gross Acre	Min. Lot Size	Avg. Lot Width
0-10	2.0	20,000 sq. ft.	100 feet
10-20	1.625	20,000 sq. ft.	100 feet
20-30	1.25	30,000 sq. ft.	100 feet
30-40	0.875	1 acre	150 feet
Over 40	0.5	2 acres	150 feet

Table 15.07.020C  
 LOW DENSITY LAND USE DESIGNATION  
 (2-6.5 units per gross acre)

Percent of slope	Dwelling Unit Per Gross Acre	Min. Lot Size	Avg. Lot Width
0-10	6.5	5,000 sq. ft.	50 feet
10-20	5.375	6,000 sq. ft.	50 feet
20-30	4.25	7,500 sq. ft.	60 feet
30-40	3.125	10,000 sq. ft.	75 feet
Over 40	2.0	20,000 sq. ft.	100 feet