

CHAPTER 8

DESIGN



VISION 2025

GENERAL PLAN

DOWNEY, CALIFORNIA

ADOPTED 1-25-2005

Downey Vision 2025

Chapter 8. Design Chapter

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INTRODUCTION

Most residents, visitors, and businesses in Downey recognize the city as the premiere quality city in the southeast area of Los Angeles County. However, others less familiar with the city's history may not share this perception and judge the city solely on the physical appearance of the area. For this reason, it is important that the visual appearance of the community portray a positive image and that the community image display the distinct and numerous resources it has to offer.

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PROPERTY APPEARANCE

Issue 8.1. Appearance of developments may impact the city's image.

The physical appearance of private property is important because it may affect not only the image of adjacent properties and neighborhoods, but also the image of the community as a whole. Poor architectural design may exhibit an image that the community itself is unattractive. For this reason, it is important that the city insist on good architectural design..



The largest obstacle to achieving high quality architectural design is the lack of use of licensed architects and other professionals during the design process. To assist property owners and builders, a city-appointed Design Review Board is available for the review of any proposed new, expanded, or remodeled construction project, with the exception of single-family residential homes.

The composition of the Design Review Board is the following: a licensed architect, a licensed landscape architect or equivalent, a licensed contractor, a licensed civil engineer, a citizen, and a business owner (for sign review only). The design review conducted by the Design Review Board typically fall into the following categories: architectural design, buildings colors & materials, landscape & irrigation, and signs.

The design review process is intended to provide professional assistance to builders and property owners. To facilitate the design process, design guidelines will be developed as a document outlining what constitutes good design.

The architectural design of new, expanded, and remodeled single-family residential homes are distinct from other uses due to the varied amount of architectural styles that are available for single-family residential homes. Consequently, single-family residential homes are generally exempt from

obtaining necessary approvals from the Design Review Board.

However, the architectural design of a single-family residential home may potentially seem inappropriate within a neighborhood displaying a particular architecture style. As mentioned previously, the biggest obstacle to achieving good architectural design is the lack of licensed architects and other professionals during the design process.

To address, a design guideline document may be prepared to assist homeowners and builders of new, expanded, or remodeled single-family residential construction that demonstrate the roof style, colors and materials, and other elements appropriate for particular architectural designs.

Goals, Policies, and Programs

Goal 8.1. Promote quality design for new, expanded, and remodeled construction.

Policy 8.1.1 Promote architectural design of the highest quality.

- Program 8.1.1.1. Discourage construction with architectural design of poor quality.
- Program 8.1.1.2. Assist homeowners and builders by providing design guidelines to illustrate good design.
- Program 8.1.1.3. Utilize the Design Review Board to provide professional assistance to builders of multiple-family residential, commercial, and other non-residential developments.
- Program 8.1.1.4. Develop design guidelines for multiple-family residential, commercial, and other non-residential developments
- Program 8.1.1.5. Encourage applicants to use licensed professionals to prepare architectural and landscaping plans.

- Program 8.1.1.6. Encourage developments to be “internally compatible” in architectural design.
- Program 8.1.1.7. Encourage apartments to be designed with amenities found in ownership-based developments.
- Program 8.1.1.8. Promote good quality sign design.

PROPERTY MAINTENANCE

Issue 8.2. Lack of property maintenance may exhibit a negative image of the City.

The lack of maintenance on private properties has a negative effect on the City's image. When properties are not maintained, the city loses its premiere image and property values begin to stagnate.



Graffiti is generally removed within 24 hours

The Code Enforcement Division of the City has as its mission to correct private properties not properly maintained and having other code violations. In most instances, the code enforcement is performed reactively in response to complaints. However, property maintenance is enforced through various sections of the municipal code and an ordinance specifically for property maintenance would facilitate code enforcement efforts.

The City may lessen the likelihood of code violations from occurring by taking the following preventive action:

- Informing the public of activities that constitute code violations (example, which activities require city permits.)
- Monitoring areas with pro-active code enforcement programs.
- Identifying specific areas as neighborhood preservation areas so that resources may be focused on areas that especially need code enforcement.
- Eliminating code violations as these are identified during the development review process.
- Revising outdated standards that are no longer needed.

Code violations may be further mitigated by the upgrading of property appearance, which creates a catalyst for the upgrading of other nearby properties. Towards this effort, the City should encourage properties to upgrade as these are reviewed through the development review process. Beautification contests for properties, such as the annual awards granted by Keep Downey Beautiful, are a successful method to draw attention to the importance of upgrading property. Keep Downey Beautiful was formed in 1977 as

city-sponsored volunteer program to encourage property renovation and maintenance and discourage litter and graffiti.

Goals, Policies, and Programs

Goal 8.2. Maintain and enhance the appearance of properties.

Policy 8.2.1. Promote compliance with code regulations.

- Program 8.2.1.1. Promote public information explaining activities that are potential code violations.
- Program 8.2.1.2. Promote proactive measures to ensure maintenance of properties.
- Program 8.2.1.3. Identify specific areas as neighborhood preservation areas so that resources may be focused on areas that especially need code enforcement.
- Program 8.2.1.4. Eliminate code violations as these are identified during the development review process.
- Program 8.2.1.5. Eliminate outdated code requirements.
- Program 8.2.1.6. Facilitate code enforcement through adoption of a property maintenance ordinance.

Policy 8.2.2. Promote the upgrading of properties.

- Program 8.2.2.1. Promote public information explaining the benefits of upgrading property appearance.
- Program 8.2.2.2. Support property beautification contests to draw attention to the importance of upgrading property appearance.
- Program 8.2.2.3. Support the Keep Downey Beautiful programs.
- Program 8.2.2.4. Encourage the upgrade of property appearance during the development review process.

STREETSCAPE

Issue 8.3. The appearance of the City as viewed from streets has an impact on the identity and image of the City.

The image of a community is sometimes derived from the community's appearance as viewed by traveling through its streets. Because streets serve as "windows" to the community, the appearance of a community as viewed from streets is important to portray a positive image and an accurate identity of that community. For this reason, the City should focus efforts on enhancing the street itself as well as the appearance of properties as viewed from streets.

Unfortunately, due to development demands, infrastructure needs and other constraints, most views from the street in Downey involve vast expanses of pavement visible from the street including the street pavement itself, curb and gutter, public sidewalks, property line walls, driveways, private walkways and parking lots. In communities with very limited open space, such as Downey, it is important to maximize the amount of landscape plant areas to break up paved surfaces.

Paved surfaces may be broken up by landscaped planting areas. The zoning code requires that each property provide a minimum amount of landscape planting area. For projects other than single-family residential, design review of landscape plans detailing the size, quantity, location and type of plant material is required. The city encourages that new projects place landscaping along the front yards and where it is most visible from the street, and that projects for the remodels and additions to existing developments include the creation and beautification of landscaping areas. Wherever possible, specimen or mature size trees are encouraged.



Landscape Median

Although the appearances of buildings and properties from all sides are important, the appearance of buildings and properties from streets is especially important since it is potentially visible to hundreds, if not thousands, of visitors a

day. Therefore, certain unsightly activities and uses are restricted to rear yards and other areas that while visible to adjacent properties, are less visible from streets. Additionally, a property's "front yard" serves as a window to the community and should not portray an image that the community at large is unfriendly and uninviting.

The city advances the following to create a positive, friendly image of the community:

- Wall and fence height should be minimized.
- Chain link or wrought iron material should be avoided.
- Prohibit the use of front yard (and street side yard) areas for the storage of trash, debris, inoperable vehicles, and canopies.
- Place accordion-type security window gates, window security bars, and other types of security devices on the inside of buildings where it is less visible.

The city can also take an active role in improving the overall appearance of the street by controlling the public right-of-way including the following:

- Promote landscaping along public streets, either in the form of medians in the middle of roadways of major arterials, planter strips along the sides of streets, or planter islands at intersections as part of traffic calming efforts.
- Modify existing paved islands and medians (especially in the south part of the City) to replace pavement with landscape planting.
- Install street trees, consistent with the adopted street tree master plan, which may involve an active role by volunteer organizations, such as Keep Downey Beautiful.
- Provide banners and other signage to create a sense of "entry" into the City or a certain part of the City, such as the downtown area.
- Provide stamped concrete or other forms of enhanced paving for streets and intersections.
- Place overhead utilities underground.
- Discourage commercial advertisements on bus benches or elsewhere along public rights-of-ways.
- Provide street furniture (light standards, traffic lights, bus benches, news racks, phone booths, trash receptacles, etc.) with consistent design, color, and style.

In many instances, the edges of a city are often ignored due to an increased focus on the core parts of a community.

However, the appearances at the edges of the City are very important since there is the opportunity for these areas to



serve as “gateways” to the community that provide a positive “first impression” as one enters the city. On landscaped medians along major arterials, there are opportunities to provide some city identity and a distinction between Downey and its neighbors by providing entrance marker signs within the landscape medians at the City boundaries. Additionally, the design of properties and buildings at the edges of the city should be especially focused to provide a positive image consistent with the rest of the city.

The appearance of residential properties from the street is especially important since residential zones make up more than half of the city’s land area and the image of residential neighborhoods sometimes defines a community as a whole. Based on this, the city has especially focused on enhancement of the street yards of residential properties with the following:

- Treat street side yards for corner lots with the same standards as front yards.
- Maximize landscaping by treating all areas in front of building footprint line with same standards as front yard setbacks, even if the building is set back beyond the minimum setback required by code (typically 20 feet in the R-1 zone).
- Prohibit the encroachment into “prevailing setbacks” by building additions which project in front of the footprints of adjacent buildings, even if set back more than the minimum distance required by the zoning code (typically 20 feet in the R-1 zone).

Goals, Policies, and Programs

Goal 8.3. Promote the enhancement of the streetscape.

Policy 8.3.1. Enhance the views of property from public streets to exhibit a positive image.

- Program 8.3.1.1. Promote prevailing street yard setbacks for buildings consistent with adjacent properties.

- Program 8.3.1.2. Maximize the landscaped setback on street yard setbacks.
- Program 8.3.1.3. Minimize the amount of pavement and other non-plant material along the street yard setbacks.
- Program 8.3.1.4. Discourage the use of street yard setbacks for uses and activities inconsistent with portraying a positive image of the community.
- Program 8.3.1.5. Discourage security devices and fence/wall designs that portray an image that the community is unfriendly and uninviting.
- Program 8.3.1.6. Encourage the enhancement of views along the railroad right-of-way visible from street right-of-ways.

Policy 8.3.2. Promote city-initiated streetscape enhancement projects.

- Program 8.3.2.1. Develop entrance marker signs with landscaping enhancements at the City boundary of major arterials.
- Program 8.3.2.2. Landscape, maintain and expand the City's street medians and islands along major arterials.
- Program 8.3.2.3. Establish landscaped and lighting maintenance districts along major arterials to fund median and entry cost
- Program 8.3.2.4. Promote attractive street furniture and fixtures.

Policy 8.3.3. Promote the installation of new trees.

- Program 8.3.3.1. Promote the installation of new trees throughout the City, but especially where visible from the street.
- Program 8.3.3.2. Identify streets that are deficient in trees.

- Program 8.3.3.3. Implement the City Master Street Tree Plan for planting, removal, replacement, type and maintenance of trees in the public right-of-ways.
- Program 8.3.3.4. Seek alternative funding to plant new trees, including grants and donations.
- Program 8.3.3.5. Support volunteer efforts to plant new trees.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Issue 8.4. Cultural resources enhance Downey's image.

Cultural amenities, including those of a historical, architectural, and archaeological nature, greatly enrich a community's quality of life by displaying a strong positive and distinct image, linking the past to the present, and boosting civic pride.



Historical Arch located at Civic Center Drive

Downey is home to many existing cultural resources. One of the challenges is to guarantee that the resources will continue to be identified and appreciated by residents. Although many of the cultural resources are City owned and operated, some rely on donations and volunteer support for their continuance so resident support is very important. Many of the cultural resources are scattered geographically throughout the City and some are poorly located. Identifying these resources and placing some of these cultural resources in a centralized location, such as the downtown area, may increase appreciation of these resources.

Downey has older buildings built before 1950 that are recognized as historical structures worthy of preservation. Because age alone is not the sole criteria for recognition of structures as historical, many other older buildings built before 1950 have not been recognized as historical structures and not provided the same level of protection from demolition or modification. There is a need for a better means for identifying historical structures, especially since some structures built after 1950 are now viewed as prime examples of 1950-s era architecture.

In addition to identifying existing cultural resources, the city has the opportunity to create additional resources, including public art. A diverse public art program that involves the entire community may further enhance the public's appreciation of cultural resources in general. To provide the

greatest impact, specific focus should be placed at the City's entryways and the downtown area.

Due to the need for coordination of the various aspects involved with cultural resources, a city-authorized commission may be the most appropriate means to provide sufficient time and focus on identifying, enhancing, and creating cultural resources.

The following are the city's major cultural resources:

- The Downey City Library has been a part of the community since the late 1950s. The 27,000 square foot facility contains over 115,000 volumes and had over 350,000 visitors in 2001. The library provides a wide variety of services including classes, adult literacy, computer training and children's reading programs. Library hours, staffing and the current number of volumes should be maintained.
- Downey Theatre. The 748-seat live stage theatre first opened in 1970 is owned and operated by the City of Downey. It plays host to a variety of events throughout the year and is home to the Downey Civic Light Opera and Downey Symphonic Society. However, the theater should be remodeled, which would make it more competitive in attracting additional users.
- The Downey Museum of Art is located in Furman Park and is the only art museum between Downtown Los Angeles and Long Beach. Its permanent collection includes hundreds of items donated and acquired over the years with a special emphasis on the art work of Southern California.
- The Downey History Center is located in Apollo Park and includes artifacts, periodicals, original records and a library collection focusing on the history of the Downey area from its beginnings as an agricultural community to the present.
- The proposed learning center at the Downey Landing development would showcase Downey's aeronautical and space-era history.

The following are some of the city's cultural events:

- The Downey Civic Light Opera presents a season of three Broadway musicals at the Downey Theatre, during a season that runs from Fall until late Spring. The Downey Symphonic Society presents a season of three

FIGURE 8.3-2
MAP OF MAJOR CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL RESOURCES



SCALE
1 INCH = 0.78 MILE



concerts in the Downey Theatre and outdoor concerts in the summer at Furman Park.

- The Downey Rose Float Association has continuously entered a float in Pasadena's Tournament of Roses Parade since 1955. The entry has the distinction of being one of only six floats which are "self-built" – or completely financed, constructed and decorated by volunteer contributions. The association also sponsors the Miss Downey Pageant.
- The Downey Chamber of Commerce sponsors the Holiday Lane Parade and the Downey Street Faire, which attracts 20,000 people annually. There is also a wide variety of business, fraternal, ethnic and educational clubs and associations that create goodwill and foster a sense of community.

The following are recognized as significant historical resources:

- The Rives Home, at Paramount Boulevard and Third Street, was built in 1911, and was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1978. The three-story Greek Revival home was built for James Rives and family. He was Los Angeles County District Attorney and a Superior Court Judge until his death in 1923.
- Casa de Parley Johnson, the Assistant League House, at 7749 Florence Avenue, was built in 1926, and placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1986. The prominent architect, Roland Coate, built it for Parley and Gypsy Johnson. Johnson made his fortune in citrus growing and petroleum speculation.
- McDonald's Restaurant, 10207 Lakewood, was built in 1953 and became eligible for the National Register in 1984. It is the oldest existing restaurant in the famous hamburger chain with the original architecture and red and white tile. The 800 + sq. ft. neon sign, "Sir Speedee" is a symbol of the nineteen-fifties.
- The Dismuke's House, built by an early settler in 1887, was moved from its original location on Firestone Boulevard to Apollo Park. The Downey Historical Society painted and restored the building.
- Rancho Los Amigos Medical Center began about 1888 as a Los Angeles County Poor Farm, housing poor and indigent psychiatric inmates. It is now a trauma and burn center. The hospital still houses polio victims from the 1950's polio epidemic. The county's architect, Mr. Muck, designed the Harriman Building, completed in 1932. The

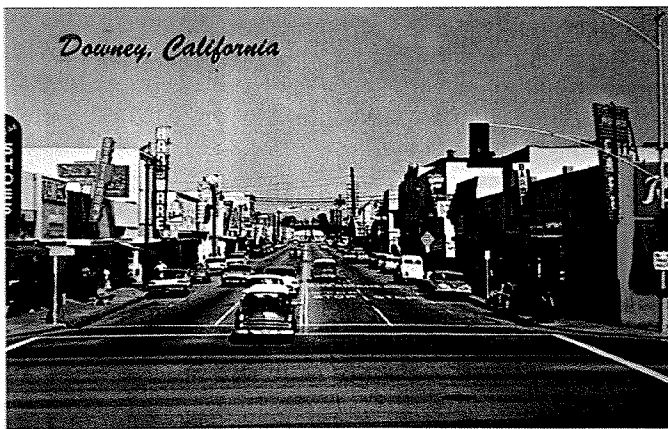
Moreton Bay fig tree, a significant mature tree on the Rancho property, is one of the largest in Los Angeles County.

- The Historical Arch located along the bend of Civic Center Drive.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF DOWNEY

The history of the city dates back to the 1800s when Downey was one of many towns to spring up along the thousands of miles of trails to the west. The city is named after John Gately Downey, an Irish immigrant who came to California during the Gold Rush and succeeded to become the state's first governor.

In November 1859, Downey bought the 17,602-acre Rancho Santa Gertrudes for 60,000 dollars. In 1873, a 96-acre parcel of the plot became the central district of a community called "Downey City." The original town grew quickly with the arrival of the railroad and construction of the Southern Pacific Railroad Depot in 1888.



By the turn-of-the-century, Downey was the undisputed center of the business and social life of the area. In 1903, the Downey Board of Trade (later renamed the Downey Chamber of Commerce) was organized. Downtown Downey contained a Sunkist packing plant, a department store, banks, restaurants and mercantile shops. It was also the site of Downey Union High School and Downey Grammar School. In the 1920s, wooden Victorian and Craftsman buildings were gradually replaced with

Downey's first masonry structures. Unfortunately, only a few of these early buildings still exist.

In 1929, inventor E.M. Smith purchased a 73 acre parcel of land one mile south of the depot. His company, Emsco Aircraft, converted the ranch into an airstrip which consolidate in Southern California. Inventor E. M. Smith, whose family had reaped a fortune from a drill bit patent for oil exploration, pioneered aviation in Downey. He purchased the 73 acre Hughan Ranch located about one mile south of

the Downey Depot. Smith's company, Emsco Aircraft converted the ranch into an airstrip. Downey had taken its first giant step for mankind.



Merlata Theatre at Downey Avenue. Circa 1930s

In 1940, Downey's population was still only 12,000. Orange groves remained visible in the downtown area with dairies located along the banks of the two rivers. However, by the late 1950s, the population swelled to over 80,000 as most of the agricultural areas were replaced by residential subdivisions, commercial centers and industrial developments. In December, 1956, the City of Downey was incorporated as a general law city, and in 1965, it became a character city.

Goals, Policies, and Programs

Goal 8.4. Enhance Downey's cultural resources.

Policy 8.4.1. Identify the city's cultural resources.

- Program 8.4.1.1. Conduct a survey to identify historic and architecturally significant structures, locations and archeological resources.
- Program 8.4.1.2. Seek listing for appropriate properties on the National Register of Historic Places and the California State Register of Historic Resources.
- Program 8.4.1.3. List significant historic resources in a Downey Register of Historic Places.
- Program 8.4.1.4. Establish a Council-appointed commission to addresses cultural resources issues, such as public art, historical preservation, and architectural resources.
- Program 8.4.1.5. Promote public information through the local schools, churches and other organizations, which explains the benefits of historic preservation and enhancement of cultural resources.

- Program 8.4.1.6. Recognize Downey's historic significance as a premier locale for post World War II and 1950s style architecture.
- Program 8.4.1.7. Support and recognize individuals and groups, such as the Downey History Center, which work to preserve Downey's historic resources.

Policy 8.4.2. Preserve the city's cultural resources.

- Program 8.4.2.1. Adopt a historic preservation ordinance that would require a permit to demolish or modify a historic resource.
- Program 8.4.2.2. Provide incentives for property owners to historic preservation for resource protection and continue to add more incentives as opportunities arise.
- Program 8.4.2.3. Promote the preservation and restoration of older structures.
- Program 8.4.2.4. Encourage adaptive re-use of older structures.
- Program 8.4.2.5. Reuse existing historic architectural elements in new construction when preservation of historic resources is not feasible.
- Program 8.4.2.6. Discourage the relocation of historic resources, or if necessary, relocate the historic resource within Downey.
- Program 8.4.2.7. Preserve and/or relocate significant archeological resources.

Policy 8.4.3. Enhance the city's existing cultural resources.

- Program 8.4.3.1. Develop an ordinance to fund and/or require public art as part of new development.
- Program 8.4.3.2. Support and encourage community events, such as the Downey Street Faire, Holiday Lane Parade and ARC Walk.

- Program 8.4.3.3. Support and encourage groups, such as the Downey Museum of Art, Downey Civil Light Opera, Downey Symphonic Society, Downey Historical Society and Downey Rose Float Association.
- Program 8.4.3.4. Encourage cultural uses to be more centrally located – preferably in the downtown area.
- Program 8.4.3.5. Develop a museum/learning center as part of the Downey Landing development.