

3C – Community Design



COMMUNITY DESIGN

Morro Bay is a small-town coastal community with eclectic style and a welcoming atmosphere. The community's style originates from both overt and subtle details in the form, function, and design of the town, and future changes to that form will need to be compatible with the established character. By setting design criteria to preserve neighborhood character and carefully considering the visual impacts of new development, Morro Bay can remain the charming coastal town that residents and visitors love.

OVERVIEW

Scope and Content

The Community Design Element addresses the components of Morro Bay's unique style that will be preserved as the city changes over time. This element focuses primarily on building design, landscaping, scale, and style. Related topics such as density and intensity and use types and locations are addressed in the Land Use Element. While this element is not a required component of a general plan, it plays a critical role in expressing the culture and design of the community, both of which are of significant concern to Morro Bay community members.

Relationship to Other Elements

This element relates closely to the Land Use Element by further expanding on how the design of various uses will preserve the culture of Morro Bay. The Circulation Element also includes related topics such as desired street designs and amenities, and the Conservation Element addresses water conservation methods that relate to the landscaping found in Morro Bay neighborhoods. The Open Space Element describes parks and natural open areas in the community that contribute to its character, and the Public Safety and Community Well-Being elements cover how the built environment relates to crime, health, and overall well-being in Morro Bay.

RESILIENCY APPROACH

Resiliency in community design primarily focuses on the use of sustainable building materials and site layouts that conserve natural features or reduce potential hazards. Ensuring that buildings are built to withstand flooding and severe storms, optimizing use of on-site renewable energy, minimizing water and energy needs, and maximizing insulation against extreme heat will help prepare renovated and future buildings for the effects of climate change. Planting appropriate trees and other vegetation can also minimize drought and heat effects.

VISION FOR COMMUNITY CHARACTER AREAS

The community design of Morro Bay includes the overall layout of the city as well as the types of buildings, open spaces, and landscaping within it. Most housing in Morro Bay was built before 1970, and many of these homes are now in need of rejuvenation. Buildings tend to be one or two stories, with smaller lot sizes and a mixture of styles and colors that contribute to the community's fun seaside atmosphere. Vegetation is typically native and drought-tolerant. The wetlands, agricultural areas, and coastline frame Morro Bay's neighborhoods, creating beautiful views from nearly every part of the city. The most common large trees are eucalyptus, cypress, melaleuca, and blue gum trees. Street trees are generally on the smaller side due to the coastal location.

The overall personality of Morro Bay is in part due to the distinct character of its ten community character areas. These neighborhoods each have distinctive physical and social characteristics that are described in this element, which also includes goals and policies to maintain and enhance each area as appropriate.

**Figure CD-1:
Community Character Areas**

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Blueprint



North Morro Bay

North Morro Bay is a mostly residential area spanning much of the length of the city on the east side of Highway 1. Buildings in North Morro Bay are mostly one- or two-story single-family homes that are newer than Downtown and Morro Heights, with some neighborhood strip commercial and office uses. The terrain provides many of these homes



a clear view of the ocean and Morro Rock. The design vision for this area includes increasing shopping and services opportunities along North Main Street in neighborhood-scale, walkable centers or clusters. The environment along Main Street should become more pedestrian friendly and include areas where commercial development is prioritized over residential. In the portions of the area that allow mixed-use development, zoning development standards should have heights sufficient to support the desired mix of uses. The character of the residential area behind Main Street is not envisioned to change. It is important to the community that residences in this area not be oversized for their lot and in relation to other residences in the character area.

Beach Tract



The Beach Tract is located on the west side of Highway 1 west of North Morro Bay and north of the Cloisters. Suburban-style single-family homes predominate in this area. The Morro Strand campground and Alva Paul Creek are also located in the Beach Tract. Homes here have abundant beach access, and the North Point Natural Area is just to the north. The

character of the Beach Tract is expected to remain relatively the same over the life of *Plan Morro Bay* as a single-family residential neighborhood along the beach. The Beach Tract only allows for single-story development, reflecting the importance of protecting ocean views.

Cloisters

Cloisters is located west of Highway 1 and south of the Beach Tract. It is one of the most recently developed areas in the city and includes single-family residential development that is clustered to protect sensitive dune habitat. It also includes Cloisters Community Park, which features trails and a wetlands area. There is plentiful access to the beach, and houses are typically one-story, larger suburban-style single-family homes of neutral color with landscaped yards. Two recreational vehicle parks, the City wastewater treatment plant, and two motels are located on the south side of Cloisters near Morro Bay High School, which has a more wooded feel from the trees planted around it.



The nature of the residential portion of the Cloisters character area is expected to remain relatively the same over the life of *Plan Morro Bay* as a clustered single-family residential neighborhood adjacent to wetlands and the beach. It is important to the community that the residences in this area not be oversized for their lot and in relation to other residences in the

character area. The character of the portion of the character area along the west end of Atascadero Road is envisioned to change if the existing wastewater treatment plant is relocated during the life of *Plan Morro Bay*. In that case, redevelopment of much of the area where the plant is currently located could occur, creating an environment more focused on pedestrians, in particular visitors and those using the area for recreation. This area would likely include restaurants, retail, additional accommodations, sports fields, and other recreation activities taking advantage of the proximity and connection to the beach and views of Morro Rock.

North Embarcadero

North Embarcadero encompasses waterfront and industrial areas that include the former Dynegy power plant site, Lila Keiser Park, the commercial fishermen's dry

storage and repair facility, and Morro Rock. Larger commercial spaces and a few homes are located in this area, and Morro Creek runs just to the north. North Embarcadero offers a clear view of Morro Rock, and the three prominent smokestacks at the power plant are the visually dominant feature of this area.

North Embarcadero also has the largest concentration of working waterfront uses in Morro Bay. Piers, docks, commercial fishing offload facilities, and other related commercial fishing infrastructure are located along the waterfront, along with restaurants and other supporting retail uses. This area also has a City-owned parking lot and provides access to Morro Rock via Coleman Drive or a boardwalk trail located west of the waterfront. The area between the waterfront and Morro Rock, including Coleman Park, is undeveloped and used for recreation.



The character in this area is anticipated to change substantially by 2040 due to the expected redevelopment of the Dynegy site following a change of ownership. It is possible some of the existing power plant buildings will be reused. However, with or without building reuse, the site is expected to house some visitor-serving businesses or facilities and may also have office, retail, or housing. In the portions of the area that allow mixed-use development, zoning development standards should have heights sufficient to support the desired mix of uses. The allowed heights should also take into account potential sea level rise impacts. Ideally the stretch of the site along Embarcadero will engage and feel connected with uses across Embarcadero and be



inviting to pedestrians. The triangle parking lot portion of the site near the southern end of the character area is likely to become a boatyard and haul-out and house a maritime museum during the life of the plan, activating the area and directly connecting to the other harbor-related uses on the other side of Embarcadero. Policies in *Plan Morro Bay* call for preparation of a

master plan for the Dynegy site and master planning for the area around Morro Rock. The vision and desired character for both of those areas would be further defined during those processes. The commercial fishing area on the west side of Embarcadero is not expected to substantially change in character. Improvements to

lateral access and additional fishing industry facilities are the only anticipated changes.

The Embarcadero

The Embarcadero is the most iconic character area in Morro Bay, providing numerous coastal access points in an urban environment. The Embarcadero has a maritime feel, characterized by low-rise one- to two-story buildings and pedestrian-friendly streets. The Embarcadero combines a working waterfront used for commercial and recreational purposes with visitor-serving retail uses. In the portions of the area that allow mixed-use development, zoning development standards should have heights sufficient to support the desired mix of uses. The allowed heights should also take into account potential sea level rise impacts. Running adjacent to the ocean and extending east to a bluff that serves as the dividing line between the Embarcadero and Downtown, the Embarcadero extends from the North Embarcadero character area to the State Park character area at the south end of the city. The bayside of the Embarcadero is fully developed and includes some older buildings alongside some of Morro Bay's newest developments.



Preservation of the Embarcadero's unique character and working waterfront is important to the Morro Bay community. The area's character changes periodically due to lease renewal and reinvestments in the lease sites on the west side of the Embarcadero. The lease sites stretch from the Morro Bay Oyster Company on the north to the colorful houses across the street from 456 Embarcadero Inn & Suites to the south. At least five of the lease sites are up for renewal in 2018, and many others will renew or turn over to a new leaseholder by 2040. All new leases require some level of investment when leases expire, resulting in improvements and sometimes full redevelopment of these properties.

Over the life of *Plan Morro Bay*, it is expected that additional improvements for lateral access and other types of access required by the Americans with Disabilities Act will occur, as well as improvements or changes, in particular to infrastructure, to address

expected impacts of sea level rise. Other changes to the character of this area include improvements and redesign of the Centennial Parkway and adjacent properties as part of the Market Plaza site on either side of Embarcadero. The plan for the Centennial Parkway calls for improvements to vehicle, bicycle, and pedestrian circulation including sidewalk widening and bike lanes. Embarcadero may become limited to one-way vehicle traffic between Beach and Marina streets. Other vacant and underutilized sites in this area, in particular parking lots, have been identified as areas for additional new amenities, businesses, and visitor-serving facilities.

Downtown

Downtown Morro Bay is located uphill from the Embarcadero between the waterfront and the Highway 1 commercial area. This area includes mostly residential uses but also has a wide variety of retail, office, service commercial, and visitor-serving uses. Most of the hotels and motels in Morro Bay are located in this area, with restaurants and retail uses concentrated on Morro Bay Boulevard. The largest concentration of two-story buildings in the city is in Downtown, and the area contains Morro Bay's oldest buildings alongside a number of newer structures. Building styles vary greatly, and fairly large, prominent trees adorn the streets.



The vision for Downtown builds on elements of its existing character including walkability and a mix of uses where the ground-floor use engages with the street and residents and visitors. The historic character of many buildings is something to be preserved and the uniqueness should be encouraged moving forward. This area should continue to provide places to shop for locals and visitors. An increase in places to work and live is envisioned. Some housing opportunities on the second floor on the primary streets of Morro Bay Boulevard and Main Street are anticipated, with more housing on the other streets in the area. In the portions of the area that allow mixed-use development, zoning development standards

should have heights sufficient to support the desired mix of uses. As noted for the Embarcadero, some vacant and underutilized sites in this area have been identified

as areas for additional new amenities and facilities. In particular, the City envisions improvements to some of these sites that would provide greater connection between the waterfront and Downtown, eliminating the “dead zone” at the top of Centennial Staircase and encouraging pedestrian traffic between the two areas.

Highway 1 Commercial

Most City government buildings and highway-serving commercial development in Morro Bay is located in this area situated between Downtown and Highway 1. Development in this area is mostly strip commercial and includes grocery stores, gas stations, and other service commercial uses. City Park is located near the roundabout at Morro Bay Boulevard. Residential uses are also interspersed in this area. For most of this area, the character is envisioned to remain similar to the current character. The area closest to the highway is auto-friendly with large parking lots and many businesses that customers visit via car including the grocery stores and service businesses. There also is not a vision to change the character of the government building area. Change is envisioned at City Park to potentially expand



the park into the entire triangular block if feasible. In addition, the creation of more housing and neighborhood-serving businesses in the blocks surrounding the park is desired to make it more inviting for park users and to create a gateway to the city along Morro Bay Boulevard. The community has expressed a desire for a more aesthetically pleasing feel to the buildings and grounds in this area.

Agriculture East of Highway 1

The character area east of Highway 1 south of North Morro Bay is mostly agricultural, with one residential neighborhood located adjacent to the highway. The northern portion of the area is primarily used for crop farming, while the southern portion is used for grazing. It is important to the community to maintain agricultural land and protect views. Both of these priorities are consistent with little to no change in this character area.



Morro Heights



Morro Heights is a residential neighborhood located on a hill overlooking the bay near the south end of the city. Most buildings are one- or two-story wood-frame single-family residential homes. Diverse home designs on larger lots and tall eucalyptus and cypress trees define this neighborhood. The vision for this area is to remain a residential area, so

there is no change anticipated in terms of the character. It is important to the community that the residences in this area not be oversized for their lot and in relation to other residences in the character area.



State Park and Estuary Area



The State Park and Estuary area is located at the southernmost end of the city. Morro Bay State Park covers most of this area and includes a golf course, campground, marina, boat launch, and hiking trails. The Morro Bay Natural History Museum is situated on a rocky outcropping overlooking the bay, and Chorro Creek flows along the southern end of this neighborhood. Black Hill, the next morro in the volcanic chain inland of Morro Rock, is located in Morro Bay State Park. Residential development is extremely limited and occurs here in a wooded setting characterized by large eucalyptus and cypress

trees, native habitat and wildlife, and hilly topography. This character area contains resources and open space prioritized for protection by the community. No change is envisioned for this area.



Specific and Area Plans

The City of Morro Bay has adopted several specific and area plans that provide design guidance for distinctive areas that require more detailed or considerate regulation. These plans cover the North Main Street and Waterfront parts of town and are summarized in further detail in the Land Use Element. Design guidelines and development standards are outlined in each plan to aid developers and homeowners in maintaining the visual identity of Morro Bay.

KEY ISSUES

Neighborhood Compatibility in Residential Areas

Morro Bay is a single distinct community made up of a variety of individual neighborhoods, and preserving the nature of these areas requires careful planning and design. The following goals and policies will ensure continued cohesiveness in the different areas of the city while embracing each character area's individuality.

GOALS AND POLICIES

GOAL CD-1: The individual identity of each of Morro Bay's character areas is embraced and represented by new and renovated development.

POLICY CD-1.1: Distinct character areas. Consider and maintain the distinctiveness of each character area in planning and design decision-making.

POLICY CD-1.2: Compatible new development. Require new development projects to be compatible with the character vision for the area in which they are located.

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POLICY CD-1.3: Design Guidelines. Create citywide design guidelines with clear intent that balance restrictions with flexibility.

POLICY CD-1.4: Design Standards. As part of the Zoning Code, adopt permanent design standards for the city that allow for a wide variety of architectural styles while maintaining the character of each character area and the city as a whole.



- POLICY CD-1.5: Complementary Design.** Require building designs, materials, and landscaping that are complementary to the landscape, climate, and existing development.
- POLICY CD-1.6: Historic Character.** Require the visual preservation of historic buildings and structures.
- POLICY CD-1.7: North Morro Bay Planning Area.** As a condition to the approval of any development permit on the Chevron property, the City shall require clear dedication of a lateral access easement along the sand area.

Commented [KK2]: Seems like this should go in the Access section in the Land Use Element.

GOAL CD-2: The community is designed to be resilient to future climate conditions, weather events, and economic and social change.

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- POLICY CD-2.1: Resilient Buildings.** Require new and significantly renovated buildings and all public buildings to be designed and constructed to withstand severe storms, flooding, and other impacts that are expected to result from a changing climate.
- POLICY CD-2.2: Local Food Production.** Encourage the installation of vegetative roofs, rainwater bioswales, and small-scale gardening and animal keeping in areas that can support such uses.
- POLICY CD-2.3: Flexible Use.** Identify potential buildings for future adaptive reuse, and encourage incorporating flexibility in building designs to maximize the future use of buildings.

In addition to some of the community character-type policies included in the Land Use chapter, here are some others for inclusion:

Enhancing all public views and the scenic qualities of the Coastal Zone shall be a priority in all City actions and decisions. Development shall only be allowed with a finding that it protects, preserves, and enhances the Coastal Zone's scenic and visual qualities.

Public views to and along the ocean and scenic coastal areas shall be protected and enhanced, and alteration of natural landforms shall be minimized.

In order to protect and enhance visual qualities within scenic public views, particularly public views of the ocean, additional development standards shall include, but not be limited to, special siting and design criteria including avoiding accessory development such as fences from public view as much as possible, height and story limitations, bulk and scale limitations, screening and landscaping requirements, natural materials and color requirements, minimizing lighting that spills into nighttime public views, avoiding glares from windows and reflective surfaces, requirements to prepare landscaping

plans utilizing drought tolerant and native plants that protect and enhance scenic resources; minimizing land coverage, grading, and structure height; and maximizing setbacks from adjacent open space areas. Clustering to maximize open space views may also be considered.

Additionally, development within visually prominent settings shall be sited and designed to avoid blocking or having a significant adverse impact on public views, including by situating buildings, access roads, and related development in a manner and configuration that maximizes public viewshed protection, and through such measures as height and story limitations, and bulk and scale limitations. Clustering development to maximize open space views may also be considered.

All new utilities shall be located underground or outside of public view.

Structures, including fences, shall be subordinate to and blended into the environment, including by using appropriate materials that will achieve that effect. Where necessary, modifications shall be required for siting, structural design, shape, lighting, color, texture, building materials, access, and screening to protect such public views.

The City shall encourage redevelopment, rehabilitation, or relocation of existing structures to improve visual appearance and to attract visitors to the City's coastline.

Site location and development of wireless telecommunication facilities shall preserve the visual character and aesthetic values of the site and surrounding land uses and shall not significantly impact public views. Attaching wireless equipment to existing structures, camouflaging, co-location, and undergrounding equipment is encouraged whenever possible.

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