

# Community Appearance and Design Element

Ocean Beach has an identity afforded it by its topographic isolation from the rest of San Diego. The Pacific Ocean, the San Diego River, and the hills of the Point Loma Peninsula define it as a distinct community. Its physical situation, level ground and gently sloping hills unbroken by canyons, contribute to a sense of peace. The views that it affords from hillsides and along existing visual corridors are invaluable.

There are several distinctive residential districts in Ocean Beach. The two higher density areas are adjacent to the coast and separated by Newport Center. The lower density residential district lies inland, separated from the coast by the expanse of high density development. This latter area is comprised mainly of single-family homes and duplexes.

There are two major activity centers in Ocean Beach. Newport Center acts as the core of the community, providing a central commercial focus. Ocean Beach Park is the center of recreational activity, serving Ocean Beach residents and the general population of the San Diego region.

Ocean Beach also has its share of landmarks. The most notable is the ocean and the coastline. In addition, there are pocket beaches and natural coastal bluffs. The fishing pier is the best example of a man-made landmark in this seaside community.

Distinctive features worthy of preservation are the attractive cottages, abundant landscaping in certain locations, spectacular ocean and bay views, recreation opportunities, and overall diversity of physical development. Unfortunately, there is another side to the Ocean Beach environmental situation. The inherent danger of community deterioration is ever present and will continue until many basic problems are resolved. These include beach and coastal bluff erosion, deteriorating and dilapidated structures, unimaginative architectural design, encroachment of bulky buildings out of scale with the existing character of the area, vehicular congestion, pedestrian-vehicular conflict, and an enormous amount of visual clutter. Finding solutions to these dilemmas is the key to the protection and preservation of one of San Diego's more distinctive communities.

## Goals

- o To protect, preserve, and enhance the natural environment of Ocean Beach.
- o To upgrade the physical character of the community.

## GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The coastline is a physical resource with distinct visual, psychological and functional qualities. For these reasons, the relationship of Ocean Beach to the coast should be considered carefully. The people of California have demonstrated their concern for coastal conservation by passing Proposition 20, the Coastal Zone Conservation Act, in 1972. The California Coastal Zone Conservation Commission has set as policy that the entire California coastal area should be recognized as a prime regional, state, and national resource. Virtually all of the Ocean Beach Precise Plan area falls within the 1,000' boundary of the coastal permit zone. The guidelines established by the Coastal Commission and the eventual plan, now being prepared, do and will contain important policies that should be considered in any future planning or development in Ocean Beach.

The views available from elevated areas and those adjacent to the beaches and ocean should be preserved and enhanced wherever possible. The City is presently drafting scenic hillside protection regulations that are specifically intended to aid in view preservation. The Comprehensive Planning Organization has a Coastal Vistas Map that defines such views. Development incentives should be considered to encourage removal of existing view-blocking structures and to encourage any new development or redevelopment from committing the same fault. Street trees, when planted, should be located so as to not block views upon maturity and to complement the surrounding area.

One of the primary methods of preserving and improving the physical appearance of Ocean Beach is to continue the desirable qualities which contribute to its character. One of the objectives of the residential element is that new residential construction be in the form of garden-type units, absent from excessive height and bulk and compatible with the overall existing character of the community. It is also important to preserve those existing structures that add to the charm of the area. A policy of the Coastal Commission is that new development shall be compatible with existing structures in terms of finished materials, colors and structured elements. Since most of the Ocean Beach Precise Plan area falls within the 1,000' coastal permit zone, this particular policy presently comes under their purview. Detailed development standards should be established in order to insure the preservation of the physical community.

The major goal of the Commercial Element is to maintain the distinct and compact nature of existing commercial centers. Newport Center should continue as the cultural heart of the community. Its pedestrian orientation should be strengthened. The design of existing and new buildings should reflect the scale and character of the existing center. Specific criteria should be developed to insure this occurrence.

Additional sign criteria should be developed that is specifically designed to enhance the character of the Ocean Beach community. Signs in the Newport commercial center, for example, should be of a small scale, giving information and direction to the pedestrian and slow-moving cars. Other criteria should detail the size of signs, materials, textures, lettering styles, and layout of the copy. Off premise advertising signs should be specifically prohibited.

Some major utilities have been undergrounded in Ocean Beach. Most of the community would benefit from an undergrounding program, specifically along heavily traversed streets. In some residential areas, however, the streets have been successfully landscaped to soften the look of poles and wires, or the lines have been located in alleys. In these instances, other environmental problems should receive a higher priority.

General landscaping recommendations exist within the individual elements of this plan. More specific criteria should be developed, including a list of vegetation types best suited to the beach community. Such criteria should be disseminated through Ocean Beach. These criteria should be coordinated with landscape guidelines of the San Diego Coast Regional Commission. Landscaping should be composed of vegetation and other natural features. All plant material should be maintained in a healthy, growing condition.

Elements such as beachfront promenades, bikeways, benches, signs, street lights, telephone booths, fountains, drinking fountains, mail boxes, trash cans, bike racks, railings, sidewalks, planter boxes, play equipment, fire hydrants, and paving material all act together to establish the visual quality of an area. Where they are located and designed haphazardly they add visual confusion and clutter to an area. All such elements should exist in a coordinated manner, and should be designed to relate to each other and to the community in order to enhance visual quality. Street furniture should relate physically and functionally to the user. These items, although small in size, can be the accent necessary to insure that the community projects a positive image.

### **Summary of Plan Recommendation**

- o That future planning and development preserve the integrity of the coastline the length of Ocean Beach.
- o That views available from elevated areas and those adjacent to the beaches and ocean be preserved and enhanced wherever possible.
- o That detailed development standards be established in order to insure the preservation of the character of the residential community.

- o That specific criteria be developed in order to preserve the overall scale and character of existing commercial districts.
- o That detailed sign criteria be developed to insure that off premise advertising signs are prohibited and signs in general enhance the Ocean Beach community.
- o That utility undergrounding proceed on a systematic basis throughout Ocean Beach.
- o That specific landscaping criteria be developed.
- o That street furniture be designed and provided to enhance the Ocean Beach physical environment.
- o That street trees be located so as not to block views upon maturity and to complement the surrounding area.