

# Excellence of Design

## Goal 3 Design With Nature, Neighborhood and Community

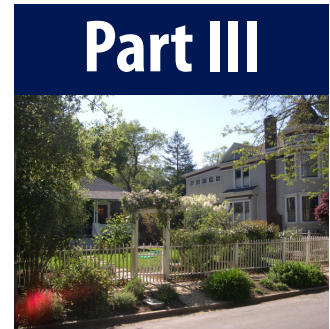
Ross encourages architectural variety of buildings and the open feeling of the Town. Buildings recede into the background while landscaping and open space take center stage. Ross' neighborhoods mix old and new construction through the use of appropriate building materials and landscaping, and through the appropriate design, scale, and siting of improvements.. We have come to expect an excellence of design that blends with the neighborhood setting.

### OUR VISION OF ROSS IN YEAR 2025

The Town has encouraged diversity in home design. While design review is based in part on the need to preserve architectural features that serve as significant reminders of the past, it nevertheless encourages 21st century creativity. The Town has made investments in infrastructure resulting in architecture and landscaping that promote the aesthetic and sustainable needs of the community.

Each neighborhood shows pride of community through maintenance and design quality. Our government responds to changing needs and is grounded in the recognition that creating and maintaining a quality environment in which to live is everyone's job.

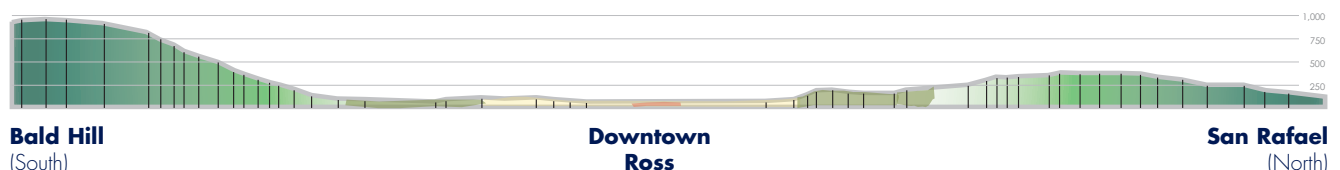
Advisory Design Review (ADR) has been established to assist applicants, staff and Town Council with the permit process. ADR helps maintain and apply consistent guidelines for architectural and landscape design.



### Major New Ideas

- Establish Advisory Design Review (ADR)
- Require Design Review for Larger Landscape Projects
- Pursue Undergrounding of Utilities
- Develop Detailed Design Guidelines and Requirements

Figure 4  
**Transect of Ross**



## Ross General Plan Policies

**3.1 Building and Site Design.** Design all structures and improvements to respect existing natural topographic contours. Open areas and buildings shall be located to protect land forms and natural site features, including cultural places and resources, wherever possible. Where feasible, site development must avoid intact or previously disturbed cultural resources during excavation and grading.



Example of tree canopy and historic bridge in Ross

**3.2 Landscape Design.** Where appropriate, encourage landscape designs that incorporate existing native vegetation, enhance the cohesiveness of the Town's lush, organic landscape and integrate new planting with existing site features. Plans shall recognize the importance of open space on a lot and shall address the look and feel of the space between structures so as to avoid overbuilding.

**3.3 Buildings on Sloping Land.** New buildings and additions to existing residential buildings constructed on sloping land should be designed to relate to the current landforms with the goal of integrating the building with the site (e.g., step with the slope). Low retaining walls are encouraged where their use would minimize uphill cutting, and large single-plane retaining walls should be avoided. Cut and fill areas and on/off-hauling should be minimized, especially in locations of limited or difficult access. Special care should be taken to final grade all disturbed areas to a natural appearing configuration and to direct stormwater runoff to areas where water can naturally infiltrate the soil.

**3.4 Bulk, Mass and Scale.** Minimize the perception of building bulk and mass so that homes are not out of scale, visually or structurally, with neighboring residences and their setting. Consider building bulk and mass during the design review process, and when applying requirements and guidelines addressing Floor Area Ratio (FAR), maximum home floor area and other development standards. Building heights should stay in scale with surrounding vegetation and buildings.

**3.5 View Protection.** Preserve views and access to views of hillsides, ridgelines, Mt. Tamalpais and Bald Hill from the public right-of-way and public property. Ensure that the design look and feel along major thoroughfares maintains the "greenness" of the Town.

**3.6 Windows, Roofs, and Skylights.** Window and skylight size, placement and design should be selected to maximize the privacy between adjacent properties. To the extent consistent with other design considerations, the placement and size of windows and skylights should minimize light pollution and/or glare.

**3.7 Materials and Colors.** Buildings should be designed using high-quality materials and colors appropriate to their neighborhood and natural setting.

**3.8 Driveways and Parking Areas.** Driveways and parking areas should be designed to minimize visibility from the street and to provide safe access, minimal grading and/or retaining walls, and to protect water quality. Permeable materials should be used to increase water infiltration. Driveways and parking areas should be graded to minimize stormwater runoff.

**Overview of Our Past Accomplishments**

The Design Review Ordinance, adopted in 1993, requires Town Council approval of all new houses and all additions over 200 square feet in size. The design review process was developed to protect the design character of the Town by providing design criteria and policies for reviewing proposed development. The intent is to encourage excellence of design, minimize environmental impacts, and ensure compatibility with the character of the surrounding area — how a house presents itself from the street, fits into the neighborhood, and blends with its setting.

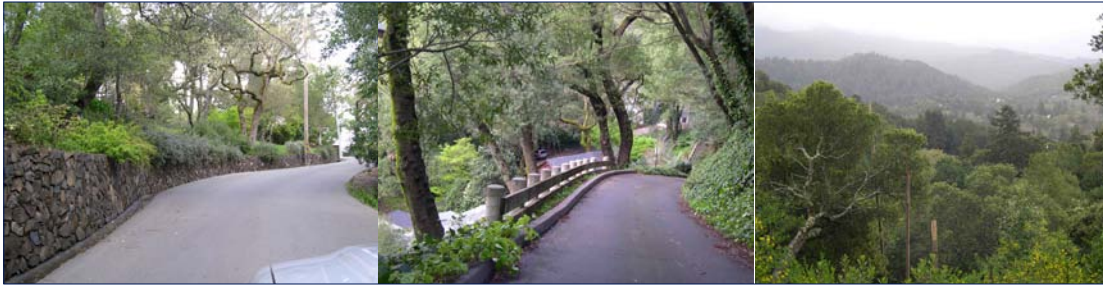
In 2000, the Town adopted a guideline maximum of 10,000 square feet of total floor area for homes. Allowances above 10,000 square feet are permitted, but only if the Town Council finds that such development intensity is appropriate and consistent with the Ross Municipal Code and the Ross General Plan.

The Town has also had to address issues unique to different areas of Ross, such as maintaining privacy on small lots, minimizing excavation and retaining walls on steep sites, and avoiding the appearance of “looming” structures projecting out from hillside sites. “Sub-areas of Ross” (neighborhoods) have been identified in the Ross General Plan to establish a generalized method of understanding different areas in the community. These areas are shown on the map in Appendix A (Figure 5) and described below. They provide a starting point for area-appropriate design guidelines and design review.



Examples of variations in street frontage of homes in Ross

**A**



**MORE STEEPLY SLOPING AREAS** where the natural setting is predominant.

**B**



**MORE GENTLY SLOPING AREAS** where the natural setting is predominant — estate lots and properties providing transition from steeper to flatter sites.

**C**



**HISTORIC, OLDER, TRADITIONAL ROSS NEIGHBORHOODS** — generally smaller lots near to the flatter, lower valley area.

**D**



**THE DOWNTOWN AREA** — the historic center of the community and location of the commercial area, Ross School and The Ross Common.

## Action List of New Ideas

**3.A Establish Advisory Design Review (ADR).** Develop a process for incorporating design review of development proposals utilizing an advisory group of local volunteer design professionals to provide technical assistance to staff.

Advisory Design Review (ADR) will act as an advisory body to Planning Department staff. It will provide professional review of design-related issues, including site planning, building massing, setbacks, light/air, privacy, etc. ADR will also consider material selection, for both architectural and landscape design. The intent of ADR is to provide applicants with helpful advice early in the review process. ADR will offer an early opportunity for neighbor input and feedback, and professional design suggestions and solutions, in an informal setting conducive to dialogue and collaborative problem-solving. ADR can produce better quality design and a smoother, less stressful, more-efficient, design review process.

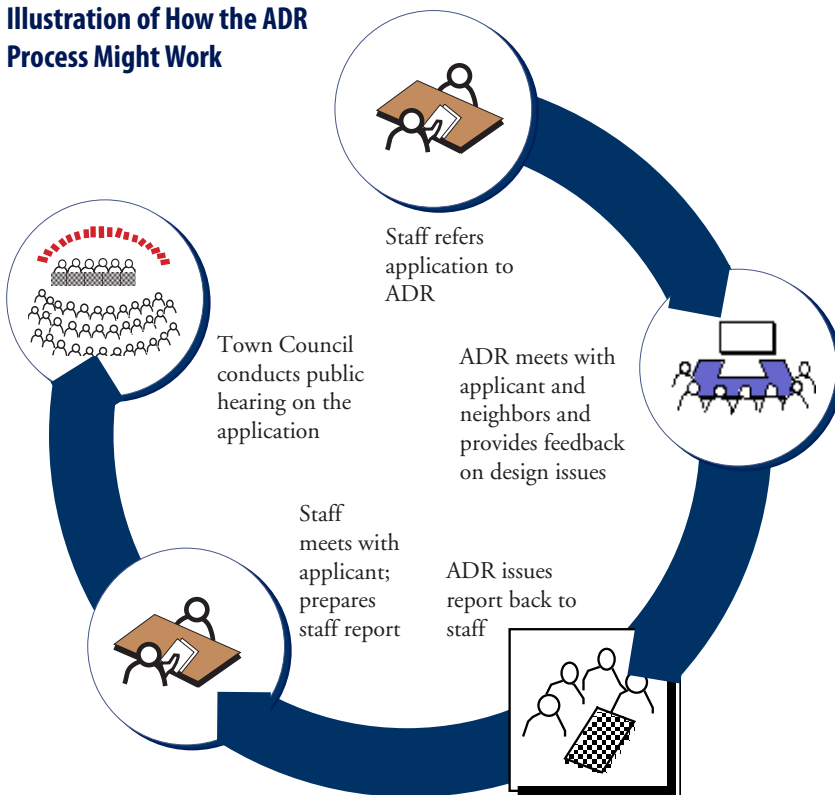
## What is ADR?

The following concepts would be considered in developing ADR:

- Identify a rotating pool of local volunteer designers, including licensed architects and landscape architects, who would be available to assist staff in the design review of proposed projects.
- Define better submittal requirements so less time is spent in design review.
- Require presentation materials to be prepared that provide a neighborhood context for design review.
- Enable ADR participation in the development of design guidelines (see Program 3.D).

Figure 6

### Illustration of How the ADR Process Might Work



**3.B Require Design Review for Larger Landscape Projects.** Require design review for large landscape projects that include significant hardscape, retaining walls, vegetation modifications, modification of topography, additional impervious surfaces, alterations of drainage patterns and other site modifications that could affect the visual and/or physical character of the site and neighborhood. Ensure that larger landscape projects include water efficient plant materials and efficient irrigation design.



Lagunitas Road/Lagunitas Bridge  
entryway to Ross

**3.C Pursue Undergrounding of Utilities.** Undertake a program to underground utilities in Town neighborhoods if an investigation shows resident financial support for such action or if alternative viable funding mechanisms can be developed.

**3.D Develop Detailed Design Guidelines and Requirements.** Prepare design guidelines to be used in the design review process. Guidelines may include, but would not be limited to: (1) definition of what is subject to design review; (2) criteria to be used in design review, including contextual criteria; (3) criteria for exceptions to standards; (4) recommendations for fire-resistant design and materials. and (5) submittal and presentation requirements. A refinement of the design review process based on sub-areas in Ross may also occur. A preliminary mapping of sub-areas is shown in Figure 5 located in Appendix A. ADR should be involved in this process.

## Goal 4

### Protecting Historic Places and Resources

History is alive in Ross. The history of our Town sets it apart from other places and makes it a unique place to live. As we move through our fast-paced, technology-driven lives, it's comforting to have a special place to escape to that connects us to our past and reminds us of the simpler days of yesteryear.

#### OUR VISION OF ROSS IN YEAR 2025

The architectural and environmental ambiance that attracted caring residents to Ross since the Town's incorporation in 1908 have been preserved through a tradition of stewardship that has guided the decisions of the Town Council. Ross Recreation, the Marin Art & Garden Center, Town parks, Natalie Coffin Greene Park, Phoenix Lake and proximity to the College of Marin are among the resources that provide cultural, educational and recreational opportunities.

The Lagunitas Bridge, symbolic entry to the Town proper, has been rebuilt to mitigate flood and seismic concerns. The new bridge maintains the character and style of the old bridge, and is consistent with the style of other bridges in Town that were designed by John Buck Leonard. The peaceful ambiance of the Ross Common provides the focal point for the community.

#### Ross General Plan Policies

**4.1 Historic Heritage.** Maintain the historic feel of Ross by preserving and maintaining historic buildings, resources and areas with recognized historic or aesthetic value that serve as significant reminders of the past.

**4.2 Design Compatibility with Historic Resources.** Require new construction to harmonize with existing historic buildings and resources, and ensure a compatibility of landscaping with Ross' historic character.

**4.3 Town Bridges.** Maintain and protect bridges as an important part of Ross' heritage. If a bridge must be rebuilt or retrofitted, it should be done in a way that is compatible with its historic look.

#### Major New Ideas

- Conduct Study to Identify Historic Resources
- Adopt Historic Resources Regulations
- Map Archaeologically Sensitive Areas



One of five historic bridges  
in the Town of Ross

**4.4 Preservation of Existing Housing Supply.** Discourage the demolition or combining of existing residential units that will reduce the supply of housing in Ross.

**4.5 Archaeological Resources.** Implement measures to preserve and protect archaeological resources. Whenever possible, identify archaeological resources and potential impacts on such resources. Provide information and direction to property owners in order to make them aware of these resources. Require archaeological surveys, conducted by an archaeologist who appears on the Northwest Information Center’s list of archaeologists qualified to do historic preservation fieldwork in Marin County, in areas of documented archaeological sensitivity. Develop design review standards for projects that may potentially impact cultural resources.



Finished obsidian arrowheads, knives and tools (Photo courtesy of the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria — see website)

### Overview of Our Past Accomplishments

Before 1993 we were losing residences that contributed to the charm and character of our community. As a result, the Demolition Ordinance was adopted requiring property owners to obtain Town approval before tearing down a residence. A welcome consequence of the ordinance has been to encourage people to purchase houses because they want to retain them and enhance their historic character, rather than raze them. The Demolition Ordinance has helped to protect historic homes from demolition, but the Town has not had specific regulations or design standards for historic homes.

The Demolition Ordinance was amended in 1998 to specifically discourage demolitions that reduce the number of housing units in Town and to combat the purchase of multiple adjacent residences to tear down and replace with a single oversized residence. It also protects historic residences from being altered without Town review. Since 1998 only one residence has been demolished without a replacement unit being built, and that was by the Marin County Flood Control District for Corte Madera Creek access.

We are trying to preserve the rich historical record that lies beneath our topsoil. There are eight known archaeological sites in the Town of Ross. These are either temporary Native American campsites or permanently occupied sites located primarily along Corte Madera Creek. The Town requires that, if an archaeological site is uncovered during any construction, activity must be halted and an examination made by an archaeologist who appears on the Northwest Information Center’s list of archaeologists qualified to do historic preservation fieldwork in Marin County, in consultation with the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, Sacred Sites Protection Committee.



## Action List of New Ideas

**4.A Conduct Study to Identify Historic Resources.** Identify potential districts and significant properties that may be eligible for National Register or California Historic Resources status, or which may have local significance or distinction.

**4.B Adopt Historic Resources Regulations.** Adopt guidelines, regulations and requirements to protect historic resources, including buildings, accessory structures, kiosks, gates, bridges, etc. Incorporate historic review into ADR design guidelines and consider the development of findings as part of the Town record for disclosure at resale, indicating that the home or site carries special significance to the town and therefore has special requirements for future renovation or alteration.

**4.C Map Archaeologically Sensitive Areas.** Consult with the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, the Northwest Information Center of the California Historical Resources Information System, and other resources to develop a map of potentially sensitive archaeological areas that can be used to identify locations where an archaeological inventory may be necessary prior to approval of development activity.



St. Anselm Church