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**COMMUNITY
DESIGN ELEMENT**

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PURPOSE

Rancho Mirage is one of several well-known resort communities in the Coachella Valley. Its identity is formed by its beautiful desert context, expansive views, and walled, richly landscaped golf-course communities. From a community design perspective, the City is most often experienced as one travels on its arterials, and therefore its image is strongly determined by its treatment of roadway edges—parkways, medians, intersections and views.

The purpose of the Community Design Element is to define the City’s most important design goals and guide new development that enhances the City’s identity and distinguish Rancho Mirage from its neighbors. It sets out the goals, policies, and actions designed to improve the image, character, and quality of life. By providing clear policy direction, it is intended to serve as a practical reference for property owners, designers, decision-makers, and developers as they develop plans and review design proposals.

It is important to view this general plan element as the first step of many in improving community design in Rancho Mirage. General plan goals, policies, and programs are the foundation for all related design decisions, but their scope is not to provide exhaustive design criteria. They must be implemented through more detailed guidelines and development plans. Therefore, throughout this element, goals, and policies are followed by recommended programs on the part of the City and the design community.

Although this element is not required by state law, the City believes that a solid Community Design Element sets the foundation for better decision-making on issues related to community aesthetics. Because the different elements of a General Plan are interrelated and consistent, the Community Design Element is influenced by the distribution of land uses in the Land Use Element, the network of roadways generated through the Circulation Element, and the preservation of views and open spaces in the Conservation and Open Space Element.

THE DESIGN CONTEXT

Community design is the collective experience of the shapes, forms, and spaces that make up Rancho Mirage’s built environment and form its identity. It is created by many factors, including the physical setting, views, arterial roadways, existing neighborhoods, public spaces, and commercial development. The scale of community design, therefore, encompasses groups of related elements rather than individual buildings. Planning for community design then must build on existing characteristics in both the natural and built environment. For the City of Ranch Mirage, the following five elements comprise the context upon which to build community design policies:

- ✿ ***Physical setting*** – A beautiful desert context and dramatic topography
- ✿ ***Expansive views*** – Rich contrasts of verdant landscaping and rugged mountains
- ✿ ***Scenic arterials*** – Major corridors provide views, access, and community identity.
- ✿ ***Existing Gated Communities*** – Constitute over 90% of the City’s residential base.
- ✿ ***Unique Retail/Commercial Developments*** – Quality retail environments can complement the City’s beautiful physical setting.





DESIGN PRINCIPLES

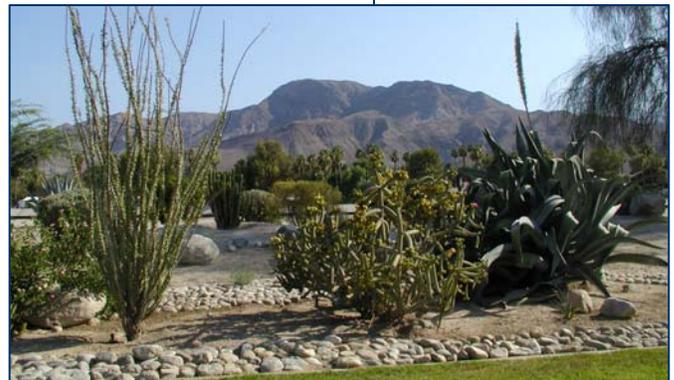
The foundations of the Community Design Element are those ideas that drive the plan. That is, they are the key principles that help preserve and enhance the image of Rancho Mirage as a special and distinct city. Those principles are:

- ✦ ***Sense of Place*** – Within its regional setting in the Coachella Valley, Rancho Mirage is a high-quality, low-density resort community. It is special in terms of its beautiful setting, expansive views, and verdant landscaping. A coordinated city graphics, gateway, and streetscape program can strengthen this powerful community image.
- ✦ ***Incorporating Nature*** – The City’s desert setting offers unique opportunities. The stark beauty of the desert is reflected in its mountain and valley views, native landscaping, and natural building materials. Care should be taken to encourage sustainable design that conserves resources and respects topography and climate.
- ✦ ***Sense of Arrival*** – Carefully sited and designed gateways are visual reminders that one has entered a special place. This arrival experience is further enhanced by roadway landscaping which transitions to more intense and formal planting as one approaches important intersections.
- ✦ ***People-Friendly Public Places*** – Quality design means provision of pedestrian amenities in commercial areas. Shaded sitting areas, mini-plazas, lively fountains, and courtyards add an important element of comfort and interest in retail developments.
- ✦ ***Architectural Quality*** – Creative architecture respects its context, satisfies its function, and delights the eye. Rather than follow an artificial, stylistic formula, architecture in Rancho Mirage should reflect the desert environment with rich, natural materials and strong indoor/outdoor relationships.
- ✦ ***Edges*** – Much of Rancho Mirage is viewed from the edges of gated, walled communities, and neighborhoods. It is here that visual continuity and design transitions can be emphasized through attractive landscaping and architecturally designed walls.

GOALS, POLICIES, AND PROGRAMS

Community Structure

The identity of Rancho Mirage is framed by the surrounding roadway system, the stark desert environment, and the backdrop of the mountains. From a community design perspective, the best opportunity to strengthen its image is by enhancing the beauty of its arterials, preserving views and encouraging quality retail development. The major focus of these efforts will be along Bob Hope Drive and Monterey Avenue, working to enhance intersection treatment and landscaping. Policies to continue and improve city gateways and the architecture, signage, and public spaces within commercial development will also be addressed.



Dramatic views of the Santa Rosa Mountains truly make Rancho Mirage a unique place.

The Community Design Map (Exhibit IX-1) shows view corridors, city gateways, enhanced intersections, and enhanced arterials. The map illustrates the City's desire to reinforce the image of a "Garden in the Desert" through quality landscaping and enhanced design along arterials, at key intersections, and around significant entry points. The map also identifies special view corridors that must be preserved and enhanced. The Community Design Map should be used as a guide when formulating the various landscape and roadway improvement plans referenced in the policies and programs of this Element.

Community Identity

Rancho Mirage is truly a garden in the desert. Its views of surrounding mountains from attractively landscaped arterials and golf course communities make it a truly special place. It has always been known as a low-density, high-quality resort town, and the implementation of the following policies and programs will enhance that image through more focused and coordinated design guidance for commercial centers, architecture, arterials, and landscaping.

As Rancho Mirage looks to the future and achieves its build-out potential, it is reaching for an even higher level of design quality. Through more visually distinct gateways, public and private signage, and architectural guidelines, the City can establish an even stronger sense of identity. By combining the best of its desert context—dramatic views, natural colors and materials, and focused landscaping—with high-quality commercial development and distinctive people-gathering places, Rancho Mirage will achieve a timeless sense of place.



The City's backlit entry monument on Highway 111 glows beautifully and imparts a sense of arrival into the City without degrading the night sky.



GOAL 1

Preservation and promotion of the special identity of Rancho Mirage as a “Garden in the Desert,” combining quality development with scenic, natural, and open space amenities.

Policy 1

The City’s symbolic identity shall be enhanced through distinct signage, gateways, architecture, and landscaping.

Program 1.A

Continue the distinctive city graphics program of entry monuments, city street signs and the inclusion of the City logo on public facilities. Incorporate city graphics and relevant landscape theme on and around bus shelters, and other public areas.

Program 1.B

Strengthen city identity by providing specially designed gateways and entryways at city borders.

Program 1.C

Incorporate desert colors and natural materials in public buildings and facilities.

Policy 2

Unique views of mountains and other natural open spaces from the City’s streets shall be preserved and enhanced.

Program 2.A

Preserve view corridors through building height restrictions, low profile median landscaping and wide landscaped parkways.

Program 2.B

Complete streetscape improvement plans for all major arterials.

Policy 3

The City shall ensure the development of high quality, visually distinctive commercial uses.

Program 3.A

Adopt and implement design guidelines for commercial development, architectural quality, people-gathering places, pedestrian amenities, landscaping, screened parking, and quality signage, and building materials.

Policy 4

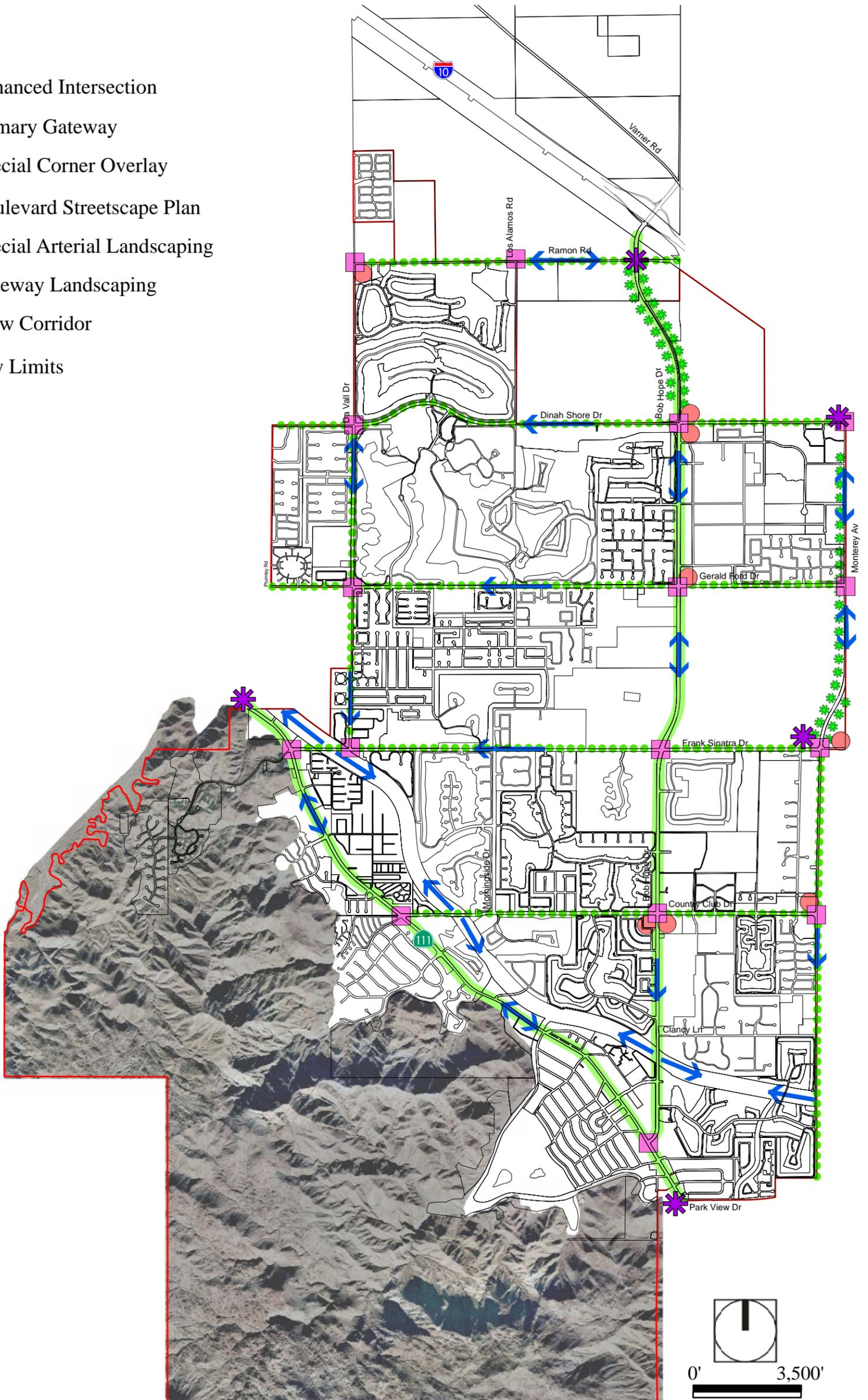
The planning and design of residential neighborhoods shall provide distinctive and characteristic design elements along public rights-of-way and within the project, creating a recognizable sense of place.

Policy 5

Multi-family residential projects shall provide well-designed and neighborhood enhancing living space, usable and safe private and common open space areas, adequate parking and appropriate automobile storage, screened trash enclosures, a comprehensive landscape program, and perimeter walls and fencing.

COMMUNITY DESIGN

- Enhanced Intersection
- Primary Gateway
- Special Corner Overlay
- Boulevard Streetscape Plan
- Special Arterial Landscaping
- Gateway Landscaping
- View Corridor
- City Limits



**COMMUNITY
DESIGN ELEMENT**

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Gateways

An important aspect of community design is to clearly mark the transition from one area, use or city to another. This sense of arrival can be quite dramatic in desert environments, where visitors often travel through wide expanses of open space before arriving at their destinations. Despite its beauty, however, many people don't realize when and if they have arrived in Rancho Mirage. To enhance the sense of arrival, the City should make strong entry statements that reinforce its identity. The most important entry to the City is from the Interstate 10 (I-10) corridor at the intersection of Bob Hope Drive and Ramon Road, although others exist along Monterey Avenue and Highway 111. The City's primary gateways should be placed at the locations identified on the Community Design Map. The design of these gateways should incorporate monument signage within the context of enhanced intersections, including special paving, widened setbacks, and coordinated, accent landscaped treatment at all four corners.



The most important entry to the City is Bob Hope Drive, seen in the photo above.

GOAL 1

Clearly marked major entry points into Rancho Mirage that incorporate distinctive landscaping, signage and wall treatments achieving a sense of arrival and symbolizing the City's identity.

Policy 1

The City shall distinguish important primary gateways into Rancho Mirage.

Program 1.A

Design a primary entry point theme and designate the future I-10/ Bob Hope Drive freeway interchange as the City's primary entry point.



Incorporating formal, gateway landscaping along this arterial, typified in the photo below, will heighten the sense of arrival into the City.

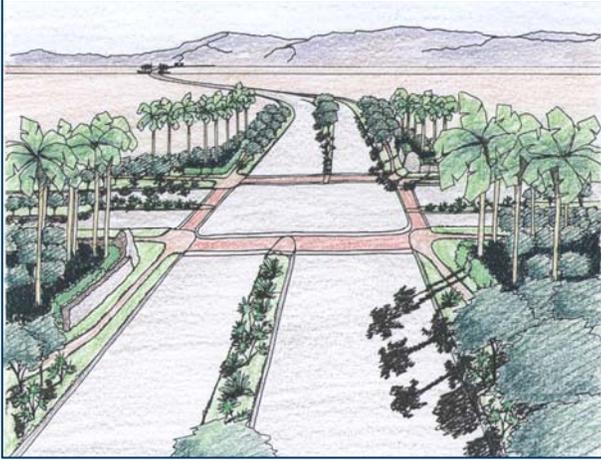
Scenic Roadways

Because much of Rancho Mirage consists of gated communities, the public realm consists primarily of broad arterials and their parkways. It is from these roads that the image of the City is experienced and it is where the City can have the most influence on community design. This element calls for more coordinated landscape treatment of these arterials, and an intensification of planting at major intersections, creating an "oasis" effect as one travels from less dense, lower scale landscaping at the mid-blocks to enhanced, more intense landscaping at the intersections.

The design plan for the City's arterials exist at three levels: boulevard, gateway, and special arterial streetscape plans. The **boulevard streetscape** plan involves the two most important arterials from the perspective of overall City identity: Bob Hope Drive—the City's primary entry and longest, most centrally located corridor; and Highway 111, the City's most important commercial corridor and link to neighboring Cove communities. This designation envisions a formal landscape plan incorporating community-wide design themes.

COMMUNITY DESIGN ELEMENT

Gateway landscaping is reserved for major entry points into the City from Monterey Avenue and the northern stretch of Bob Hope Drive between Dinah Shore and Ramon Road. Monterey Avenue, the western half of which lies within Rancho Mirage, plays an important role in distinguishing the City from its neighbor. Bob Hope Drive curves and rises from Ramon Road to gradually reveal more and more dramatic views of the City and its surrounding mountains. This gateway landscape plan envisions a formal, skyway design with decorative palms interspersed with smaller specimens creating a dramatic and rhythmic entry into the City.



Rendering of gateway landscaping at the Bob Hope Drive and Dinah Shore Drive intersection. With the extension of Bob Hope Drive, this intersection becomes a major entry point for Rancho Mirage.



This plan of a general intersection accentuates the crosswalks with special paving materials. As well, the widened setback and intensified vegetation at this intersection demonstrates the “oasis effect.”

The third design designation is **special arterial landscaping**. This is reserved for the east/west arterials, and parts of Monterey Avenue and Da Vall Drive. This concept allows for more design flexibility where each roadway takes on a unique landscape theme reflecting surrounding land uses, such as the adjacent gated communities. Depending on surrounding uses, these streetscape plans can feature both formal and informal landscape treatment, drawing on the design character of adjoining development.

It is important to realize that the implementation of these streetscape improvements is both a public and private responsibility. Whereas the City is responsible for overall design determination and capital improvements along public rights-of-way, the development community will both influence and help implement these improvements along selected stretches of the roadways. The benefits for the City and its residents will be strong and lasting. Many of the arterials are already well landscaped, but enhancing these efforts along key stretches and creating distinct streetscape plans for different corridors will strengthen their identity.

GOAL 1

Scenic roadways that impart a sense of place and are attractively landscaped, provide visual continuity along adjacent uses, preserve views, and create focused intersection landscaping.

Policy 1

The City shall develop and maintain high-quality roadways that frame views, buffer surrounding residential development, and enhance commercial uses.

Program 1.A

Establish and maintain a hierarchical streetscape improvement plan—boulevard, gateway, and special arterial landscaping—for all major arterials within the City.

Program 1.B

Design medians that complement each arterial, reflecting the desert setting, and resource conservation.

Policy 2

The City shall ensure the development of well-designed, richly landscaped intersections that are attractive to drivers and pedestrians alike.

Program 2.A

Develop streetscape plans where major intersections serve as visual “oases” in contrast to the lower scale landscaping of mid-block parkways and medians. This visual transition to a more formal, more intense, and taller landscaping will heighten a sense of arrival and provide accented focal points along arterials.

Program 2.B

Design enhanced intersections at key points in the City that include coordinated planning for all four corners through widened setbacks, special crosswalk paving, accent lighting, trees, and other landscaping.

Policy 3

View corridors shall be preserved through streetscape improvements and specialized design standards.

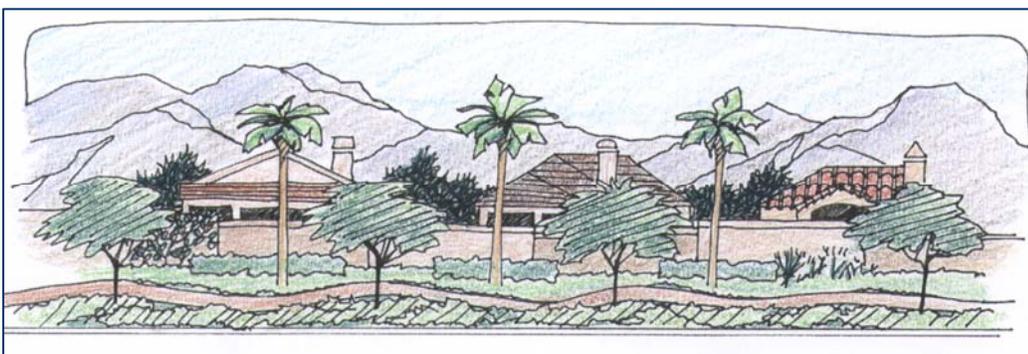
Program 3.A

Where practical, widen parkways for view preservation, enhanced landscaping, and to minimize the visual impact of perimeter walls.

Program 3.B

Expand the design review process to require an analysis of the visual impacts of rooflines of the homes abutting the perimeter walls along arterial roadways and reduce their visual impacts through:

- ✦ Increased backyard setbacks for homes that abut major roadways
- ✦ Requiring that roofs of adjacent homes be of a different style
- ✦ Encouraging low-profile roof designs such as shallow-pitched hipped roofs
- ✦ Requiring architectural elevations of all sides of proposed structures



This sketch illustrates a view of a variety of low profile roof types seen from the street. Materials used for both the homes and walls exhibit natural earth tones complemented by the landscaping.



Program 3.C

Underground utilities whenever possible and adopt lighting standards that create the minimum visual impact without compromising safety.

Landscaping

Rancho Mirage’s identity as a “garden in the desert” is made possible by its extensive landscaping. As the City’s most salient feature, landscape design is critical to place making and reinforces important contrasts. One example is the juxtaposition of lush golf courses and water features with desert plants in a harsh environment; another is the formal design of rows of palm trees with low scale, meandering parkways.

It is important to remember that a desert climate does not preclude attractive landscaping. Many of the City’s drought-tolerant plant specimens bloom for months at a time. Combining trees with low-lying bushes and ground cover provides variety and can create a dramatic sense of rhythm along roadways. Carefully planned landscaping provides the City with its best opportunity to beautify its public spaces.

GOAL 1

A landscape program that promotes aesthetics, conservation and place-making.

Policy 1

Landscape plans submitted to the City shall be consistent with this Element.

Program 1.A

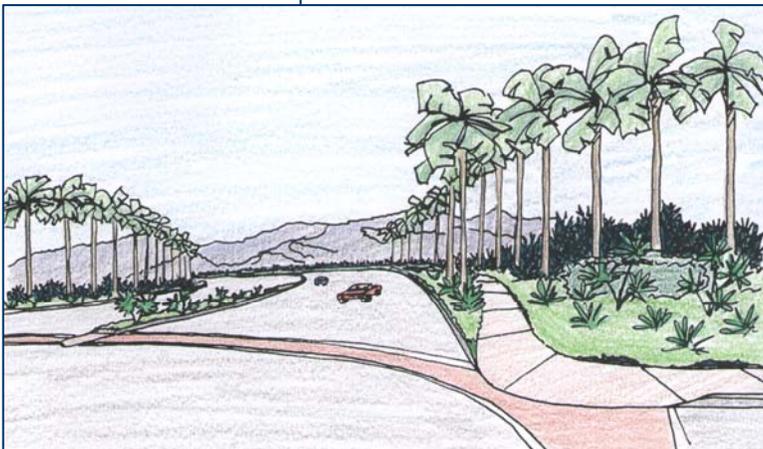
Require the use of a wide variety of regionally appropriate plant materials.

Program 1.B

Design medians with low scale, hardy plant specimens.

Program 1.C

Develop medians and parkways that achieve an interesting visual rhythm through the consistent placement of trees and plant materials.



This perspective of an intersection demonstrates the sense of rhythm landscaping may convey, enjoyed by both the central roadway and the sidewalk.

Perimeter Walls/Fencing

The majority of neighborhoods in Rancho Mirage are gated; consequently, the design of perimeter walls and fences is crucial to the City’s image. Viewed from cars, these features can be either attractive or monotonous. With careful thought and creativity, walls, and fences can do more than provide privacy—they can be an attractive element of the streetscape.

The City currently has a huge variety of perimeter walls and fences, some of which blend into the desert context while others do not. The design goal is to encourage walls and fences that are attractive in their own right and are also well integrated into the surrounding landscaping. Appropriate scale, color, materials and design are the keys to walls and fences that provide privacy, preserve views, and enhance aesthetics.

GOAL 1

Walls and fences that act as attractive elements of the streetscape, while providing privacy and views, creative design, and visual continuity.

Policy 1

Wall and fence designs shall be considered important components of the design review process and overall streetscape improvement plans.

Program 1.A

Encourage the use of quality and/or natural materials such as stone, plaster, stucco, and wrought iron.

Program 1.B

Limit the height of perimeter walls and fences to balance privacy needs with view preservation.

Program 1.C

Integrate wall breaks and transparent fencing within perimeter walls to provide scenic vistas without compromising privacy.

Program 1.D

Where transparent fence breaks are not practical, break up long stretches of walls or fences by requiring landscape screening, vertical piers or columns, and façade detailing.



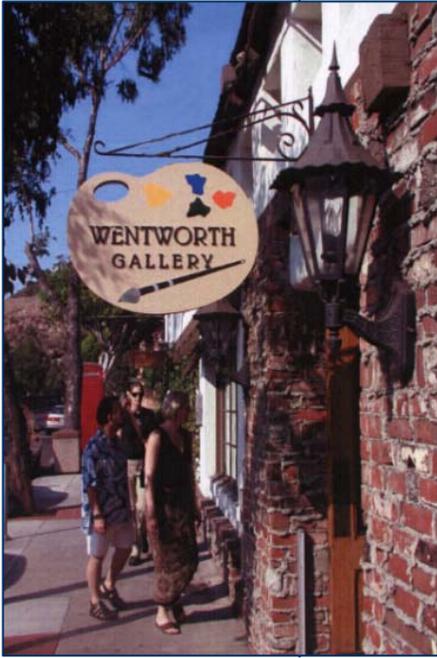
The wall stretch above utilizes natural materials for façade detailing. This photo and the one below exhibit landscaping that is attractive, water-wise and reflective of the desert context.



The visual impact of this perimeter wall minimized by natural landscaping and breaks along the façade.

Signage and Lighting

From an aesthetic perspective, both signs and lighting are hard to design in the desert. In the bright sun and expansive space, poorly designed signs can be very obtrusive. Also, glaring nighttime lighting can destroy the beauty of the desert evening. Moreover, the City is within the Palomar restricted nighttime light zone that prohibits obtrusive nighttime lights. Therefore, lower scale, accent, and back lighting is the preferred alternative and can have a dramatic effect during the beautiful desert evenings.



Signage should address both the pedestrian, as this double-faced projected sign does, as well as autos on the central roadway.

From an aesthetic perspective, the City has long realized the significant impact that sign design and quality has on community image, and the quality of its signage has improved progressively. Many of its monument signs along Highway 111 are attractive, distinct, and appropriately scaled, and its banner program along Restaurant Row is excellent. Within its commercial areas, wall signs are clear and varied. Its public sign program incorporates natural colors and features the City logo. Efforts to replace aging signs should be undertaken, and sign design and type will continue to be an important part of the design review process.

GOAL 1

Signage of the highest level of design and construction quality.

GOAL 2

Protection of the star-studded desert night sky from excessive glare.

Policy 1

The City shall encourage high-quality, low-scale signage that effectively communicates in an attractive manner.

Program 1.A

Encourage signage that includes raised letters, wall signs, projecting double-faced signs, and customized logos.

Program 1.B

Where freestanding signs are necessary, they should be designed in a vertical monument format with consistent lettering, color, and style, capturing the architectural theme of the commercial area of which they are a part.

Program 1.C

Discourage and/or prohibit the use of pole signs, roof signs, temporary lettering of window signs, blinking or flashing signs, and temporary signs.

Program 1.D

Use natural stone features to surround sign bases or supporting structures.

Program 1.E

Develop distinctive city signs that incorporate desert colors and distinctive graphics.



a.



b.

The monument signage along Restaurant Row (a. and b.) employs natural colors and materials to provide signage that is highly visible and attractive during day or night.



c.

This restaurant's signage (c.) incorporates colors, materials, and landscaping that complement the surrounding architecture.



d.

This restaurant (d.) illustrates a combination of backlighting and uplighting that attractively communicates the presence of the building.



e.

An entry monument sign for The River (e) employs backlighting to create a sign that is visible and attractive for both pedestrians and vehicles.

This restaurant (f.) demonstrates the effective use of backlighting and ambient lighting to showcase the entrance without disturbing the night sky.



f.



Program 1.F

Replace aging signs that do not reflect the City’s identity or do not effectively communicate information.

Policy 2

Lighting features that preserve the beauty of the desert night while still performing directional, safety, and informational functions shall be designed and incorporated into development projects.

Program 2.A

Use low-scale, accent, and back lighting to highlight key entry points, signage, enhanced intersections, and feature landscaping.

Architecture

The architecture of the Coachella Valley has a decidedly mixed heritage. Whereas Spanish and Mediterranean designs have been popular since the early 1920s, a variety of styles are now common. Of recent interest is “desert modern,” combining modernist influences of the 1950s with desert colors and the latest technological materials. Rancho Mirage’s City Hall reflects this creativity with its expressively modern façade.



City Hall’s low-rise design embraces the outdoors, yet is clearly modern in style.

Rather than impose an artificial community style, the City seeks quality design that fits its context. Desert architecture must contend with harsh elements and the conservation of resources. Energy-saving, sustainable design practices, often called “green building” elements, are particularly appropriate here. In addition, architecture that blends into the landscape, with a sense of living indoors and outdoors simultaneously, is particularly appropriate.

GOAL 1

Architecture that is sensitive to its context, blending quality materials, distinctive detailing, and a strong sense of living with nature.

Policy 1

The City shall encourage cohesive yet flexible architectural design to all structures within the City.

Program 1.A

Write architectural and site design guidelines that feature best practices in the Coachella Valley area and include:

- ✦ A menu of architectural styles and elements
- ✦ Warm, natural desert color palettes
- ✦ Quality materials and surface texture
- ✦ Low profile roof types and designs
- ✦ Ancillary features such as patios, arcades, courtyards, and other outdoor features

Program 1.B

Require, as part of the design review process, that plans include all elevations of a proposed building or dwelling.

Program 1.C

Initiate an awards program for architects, designers, and builders who incorporate exceptional quality, attention to detail, and desired community design policies in their project submissions.

Program 1.D

Reduce the visual impact of garages within residential neighborhoods by recessing them from the front elevation, encouraging side-loaded designs, and prohibiting adjacent homes from having identical front-loaded orientation.

Program 1.E

Encourage rich, natural earth tones rather than primary colors for buildings, homes, walls, and sign structures.

Program 1.F

Assist homeowners' association groups in updating residential development standards and guidelines.



The success of "The River" shopping center lies in its distinctive architecture, rich materials, people-friendly spaces and quality mix of retail development. Desert rock and landscaping is juxtaposed with its many water features.

Policy 2

The City shall encourage new development to incorporate "green building" practices to maximize resource conservation and be compatible with the surrounding desert environment.

Program 2.A

Establish an incentive program for "green building" practices, including:

- ✿ Active and passive solar design
- ✿ Natural ventilation and insulation
- ✿ Drought-tolerant landscaping
- ✿ Storm-water runoff capture
- ✿ "LEED" certification for all public buildings

Program 2.B

In the design review process, require homes to integrate shade features such as awnings and extended rooflines into the design of the structure to protect against an overexposure to sunlight. Also require outdoor areas oriented east and west to incorporate shade structures.

LEED Certification

(Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design)

The LEED Green Building Rating System® is a voluntary, consensus-based national standard for developing high-performance, sustainable buildings. LEED emphasizes building standards for sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency, materials selection, and indoor environmental quality.

Members of the U.S. Green Building Council representing all segments of the building industry developed LEED and promote green building through a certification system.

Green Building Design Characteristics include:

- ♦ Deep roof overhangs provide shade during summer months
- ♦ Sliding doors maximize sunlight and breezes during milder winter months
- ♦ Wall insulation and double-paned glass block heat
- ♦ Building orientation that maximizes natural ventilation
- ♦ Landscaping that cools buildings and blocks solar exposure.

Commercial Development

The City seeks to build and attract a caliber of retail development that matches its high amenity residential areas. To encourage more attractive and visually coordinated retail developments, the City adopted a Special Corner Overlay Zone (SC). The overlay zone requires large minimum setbacks and landscaped buffering of parking and encourages pedestrian plazas, shade structures, and rich architectural façade detailing.

In particular, the City seeks to create unique retail spaces that are architecturally rich, pedestrian friendly, and economically viable. The best current example is “The River,” an award-winning retail development that combines shopping, entertainment, and dining in a beautiful setting of distinctive architecture, water features, and people-gathering places.



The photos above and below exhibit the use of shade structures, sitting areas, and novelty fountain designs, all as a way to bring people together.



In a city where many residents live in gated communities and where the development of a formal town center is impractical, the role of commercial centers is more than that of providing shopping and employment opportunities. Commercial centers are the most common places where residents from all over the City are likely to meet on a casual basis. Therefore, providing comfortable and attractive gathering places is not only good for business—it’s good for the community.

GOAL 1

Retail centers in Rancho Mirage that are visually attractive, people-friendly, and economically successful.

Policy 1

Projects shall incorporate architectural interest and variety within the context of a unified setting, including commonalities of color, landscaping, signage and lighting. Strong architectural detailing including façade articulation and varied building materials, colors, and massing shall be encouraged.

Program 1.A

Adopt design guidelines for commercial centers to be used in the development review process.

Policy 2

Projects shall provide comfortable, attractive, and distinctive pedestrian amenities including sitting areas, shade structures, fountains, and arcades.

Policy 3

The City shall encourage the incorporation of arcades and covered paseos in the design of retail commercial structures.

Policy 4

Projects shall incorporate a sense of playfulness into the design of public places with novelty fountains and public art.

Policy 5

Projects shall design highly visible entrances through accent landscaping, monument signs, back lighting, specialized paving, and other design amenities.

Program 5.A

Adopt a custom sign program for major retail centers that emphasize raised letter and double-faced projecting designs.

Policy 6

Projects shall incorporate rich and varied paving materials on entry driveways, pedestrian connections from parking areas, pedestrian paths along storefronts, and within plazas and courtyards.

Policy 7

Monument, retail and directional signs shall use accent lighting.

Policy 8

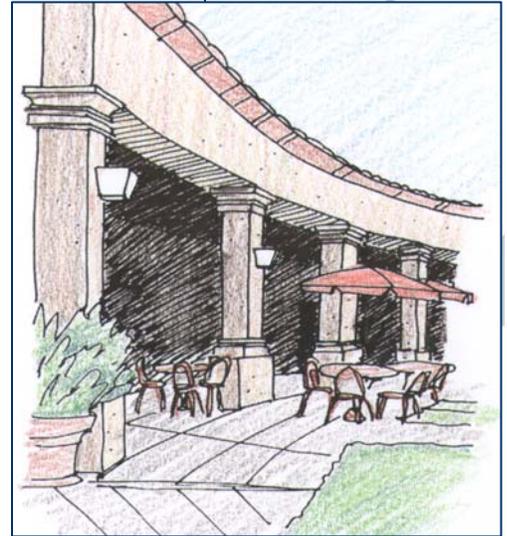
Projects shall incorporate monument signs near corners or entrances to retail centers.

Policy 9

Community meeting and conference rooms shall be incorporated in all large commercial centers. The design of such facilities should be consistent with the theme of the center and be readily accessible and visible to users and visitors.

Policy 10

Service bay doors, necessary for tire stores, service stations, lube shops, and car washes, should be oriented away from public streets and screened from neighboring properties.



This sketch portrays arcades wide enough to accommodate walkways and tables.



Desert landscaping may serve as the centerpiece for a public space.



Varied paving materials encourage pedestrians and delineate possible gathering places.

Parking Design

The treatment of parking in commercial districts is very relevant to maintaining high-quality public areas in Rancho Mirage. Although many desert communities have utilized ordinary site plans that allow large parking areas to front retail buildings, creating an unattractive streetscape and public environment, Rancho Mirage is guiding the development of parking plazas. The City recognizes that the materials, landscaping, circulation, and layout of these parking areas is fundamental to the overall image of its large retail centers.



Incorporated into parking designs, shade trees reduce the visual impact of expansive paved areas. Shade trees also reduce the effects of the sun and desert climate on parked vehicles and pedestrians.

In league with the City's Special Corner Overlay Zone (SC) ordinance, well-designed parking areas can reinforce the architecturally rich, pedestrian-friendly, and economically viable nature of current commercial programs in Rancho Mirage.

GOAL 1

Distinctly designed parking areas in the City's commercial centers that incorporate rich paving materials, generous landscaping, clear and safe pedestrian and vehicular access, and protection from the desert climate.

GOAL 2

Parking areas that are screened from public streets to the greatest extent possible.

Policy 1

Parking shall be screened from roadways by encouraging landscaped medians, berms, trellises, grade changes, or placement behind buildings.

Program 1.A

Provide design guidelines for the techniques to screen parking from roadways and to reduce the visual impact of parking areas.

Policy 2

The City shall encourage layered landscaping with overstory canopy trees for shade and understory shrubs and groundcover in parking areas.

Policy 3

Projects shall configure parking areas to allow for the free flow of vehicular traffic and convenient vehicular access to customers.



Sidewalks situated within parking areas clearly delineate pedestrian walkways and foster pedestrian safety and access to retail destinations.

Program 3.A

Require and provide clearly delineated pedestrian routes from parking areas to commercial uses to facilitate easy, safe pedestrian movement. Separate or buffer vehicular routes from pedestrian routes.

Program 3.B

Provide a signage program that clearly defines entrances, exits, traffic flow, handicapped zones, and service areas.

Policy 4

The City shall encourage the landscaping of parking areas to reduce the deflection of heat into nearby buildings and to reduce the paved surface area. Shade trees are especially encouraged.

Policy 5

Lighting shall be directed downward to protect from nighttime glare and illuminate pedestrian pathways with bollard lighting.

Policy 6

Projects shall provide directional and identification signs in contiguous parking areas one acre or greater in size to facilitate pedestrian movement to and from parked vehicles.

People-Gathering Places

Since many residents of Rancho Mirage live in private, gated communities and tourists come to the City for recreation, leisure and relaxation, commercial centers take on a very important function as public gathering places. The often beautiful yet extreme climate encourages one to linger, relax, and rest. For these reasons, incorporating plazas, courtyards and other pedestrian amenities is a goal of the City, as is reflected in the guidelines of the Special Corner Overlay Zone ordinance. Generally, people-gathering places enhance community identity, vitality, and social interaction.

Designing places where people enjoy gathering is more art than science, however. In general, plazas that are the most successful have clearly defined, amenity-rich spaces rather than large, open areas. This means plenty of seating, convenient access, popular adjacent uses, shade, and quality materials. In addition, people of all ages love novelty and variety, and this can be provided through interesting fountains that incorporate elements of surprise and invite the user to interact with the splashing water.



This plaza, although well defined by surrounding buildings, lacks vitality, shade, landscaping and items of interest to the pedestrian.



Shaded areas with seating provide incentives for pedestrians to gather.



GOAL 1

A City that is noted for lively and attractive public plazas with a combination of quality seating, shade, fountains and other pedestrian amenities.

Policy 1

Commercial developments shall be designed to incorporate attractive, people-friendly spaces.

Program 1.A

Provide ample and comfortable sitting areas, preferably moveable seating, in shaded plazas, courtyards, and arcades.

Program 1.B

Keep plazas and fountains at ground level for greater accessibility.

Program 1.C

Ensure that gathering places are visible from the street or parking areas.

Program 1.D

Incorporate interesting design features which draw people of all ages together such as novelty fountains, public art, or historical references.

Program 1.E

Avoid large expanses of open space. People prefer defined spaces that provide a sense of enclosure without being confining.

Program 1.F

Amend zoning codes to incorporate development standards.



The fountain on the right is not only more accessible, but more interesting. It randomly sucks in water and ejects it in unpredictable ways. Kids and adults love its sense of surprise.

By contrast, the fountain on the left is less accessible and has a mundane design that fails to attract use.

