DIVISION 3.5 BUILDING STANDARDS

Sections:

3.5.1 Building and Project Compatibility — N.A.

3.5.2 Residential Building Standards

(A) ***Purpose/Applicability.*** **— N.A.**

(B) ***Detached Housing Model Variety.*** **— N.A.**

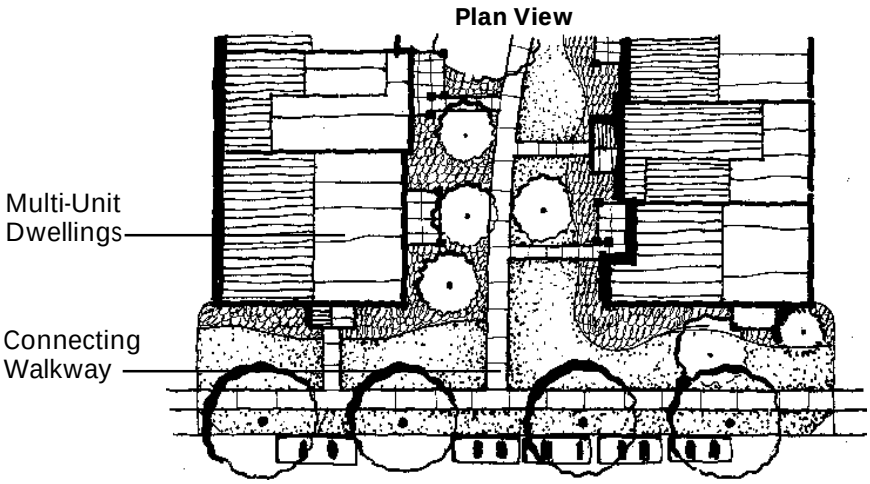
(C) ***Relationship of Attached and Multi-Family Buildings to Streets and Parking.***

(1) *Orientation to a Connecting Walkway.* Every front facade with a primary entrance to a dwelling unit shall face the adjacent street to the maximum extent practicable. Every front facade with a primary entrance to a dwelling unit shall face a connecting walkway with no primary entrance more than two hundred (200) feet from a street sidewalk.

(2) *Street-Facing Facades.* Every building containing four (4) or more dwelling units shall have at least one (1) building entry or doorway facing any adjacent street that is smaller than a full arterial or has on-street parking.

Examples & Explanations

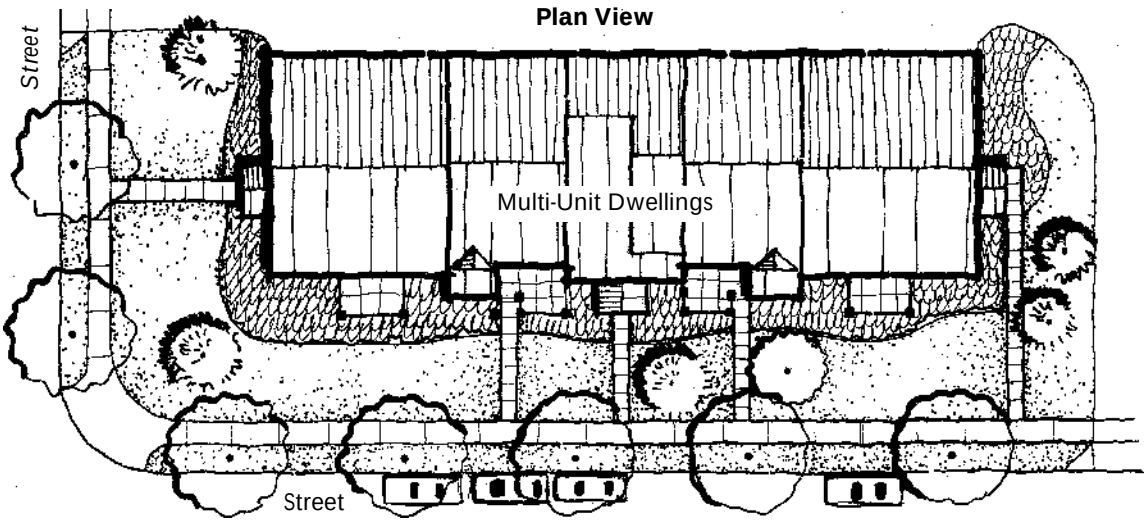
Dwellings facing connecting walkways leading from streets. When this type of arrangement is used, the distance from the street to a main building entrance is limited to 200' (about half a block in traditional terms), so that residents can easily walk out the door directly to the city sidewalk network.



Attached and Multi-Family Building Relationship to Streets and Parking

This section calls for multi-unit dwellings to be arranged in the traditional manner of homes along neighborhood streets. It is inseparable from Section 3.6.3, Street Pattern and Connectivity, and from Sections 4.4 and 4.5, the Neighborhood zone districts, which also require a fabric of streets and blocks.

Above and below, multi-unit dwellings face neighborhood streets, with side and rear driveways respectively.



A positive urban relationship to the street integrates multi-unit dwellings into a neighborhood. The building above gracefully shares the street with other kinds of dwellings in a "medium density mixed use neighborhood" setting. The Code calls for this form of real estate development.

In the "apartment complex" form of development, parking lots take the place of streets and sidewalks as the community connection. The Code essentially says "instead of attaching a traffic outlet onto the city, extend and connect the skeleton and circulation system — the carrying capacity — of the city." Again, the key to this is simply nice streets.

Why These Standards?

The approach gives multi-unit dwellings a clear street address and all that goes with it — identity, a dignified position in the community, and clear connections to the rest of the community. Visitors, residents, and emergency service providers can easily find their way. A corollary is that neighborhood streets must be provided, which then lace new developments together in a town-like pattern.

This fits with a whole approach of building a walkable city, versus allowing a disconnected series of subdivisions and complexes.

Like much of the Code, the standards are partly a response to recent examples and patterns of auto-oriented development. This section is counter to freestanding development formulas which float anonymous buildings indeterminately in large parking lots.

This example summarizes a positive urban relationship of multi-unit dwellings to streets. Key elements are street-side parking, street trees, ample sidewalks, and a transition from public to private areas marked by low walls, fencing, plantings, steps, railings, entrances, and varied building faces that relate to the street. Parking is placed behind or between buildings, avoiding impacts of driveways, parking lots, garages, and dumpsters on neighborhood streets.

Driveways and parking lots are the only connections in these 5 examples. They summarize a common lack of relationship between apartment complexes and the rest of the city. New complexes typically have decent buildings, trees, and adequate parking. The makings of a town are mostly there; the trick is to arrange them around streets to make a town.

a.

b.

c.

d.

a.-d. *No walkways lead in or out.*

b. *Parking lots are needed, but should not replace local streets as they do in this example.*

c. *No connections lead in or out to the left or forward from this viewpoint, despite a nearby park, more dwellings, stores and services in those directions.*

d. *A legacy of disconnection — dwellings are isolated from nearby day care and stores by parking lots and fences.*

These large dwellings sit like houses, each with an address, mailboxes, front yard, sidewalk, and tree-lined street. Features along sidewalks, like this low wall, define both the sidewalk and the yards as distinct spaces, marking territory in a graceful way.

Details and styles can vary widely within the basic arrangement the simple standard aims for.

a.

b.

c.

d.

a-c. Dwellings facing streets.

d. *A connecting walkway spine can function in lieu of a street sidewalk.*

Streets and connecting walkways establish logical community relationships between different land uses.

Office building sharing a street with a fourplex. Either building looks adaptable over time because of the basic fit within a larger fabric of buildings in a real neighborhood. True creativity is needed to achieve this graceful integration.

A simple, timeless town pattern: a neighborhood commercial building anchors a street corner with dwellings further down the street.

Dwellings, a day care, and a convienience store ehare only a jumble of parking lots. The standards aim for shared streets and sidewalks to connect these kinds of uses together.

This is the only "direct" connection between an apartment complex and a neighborhood commercial center full of services, shops, and other potential everyday walking destinations. (A narrow walk and steps connect around the dumpster enclosure on the left and the back building corner.) A more logical, direct relationship is possible, it just wasn't thought about by either of the two developers or the City.

More Examples

"More Like This". *Nice street, warm brick, green spaces.*

"Not this". *No connecting walkways, blank walls face street.*

"More Like This".

"Not this". *No connecting walkways, monotonous repetition.*

Fourplex demonstrating all purposes and standards.

"This"

If a big building is placed sideways to the street, the end wall should have animating features. To help ensure this, it must have a doorway, unless the street is an arterial with no on-street parking.

"Not This"

End Examples and Explanation of 3.5.2(C)

(D) **Residential Building Setbacks. — N.A.**

(E) **Garage Doors**. To prevent residential streetscapes from being dominated by protruding garage doors, the following standards shall apply:

(1) Street-facing garage doors must be recessed behind either the front façade of the living area portion of the dwelling or a covered porch (measuring at least six [6] feet by eight [8] feet) by at least four (4) feet. Any street-facing garage doors complying with this standard shall not protrude forward from the front façade of the living area portion of the dwelling by more than eight (8) feet.

(2) Garage doors may be located on another side of the dwelling ("side- or rear-loaded") provided that the side of the garage facing the front street has windows or other architectural details that mimic the features of the living portion of the dwelling.

(3) Garage doors shall not comprise more than fifty (50) percent of the ground floor street-facing linear building frontage. Alleys and corner lots are exempt from this standard.

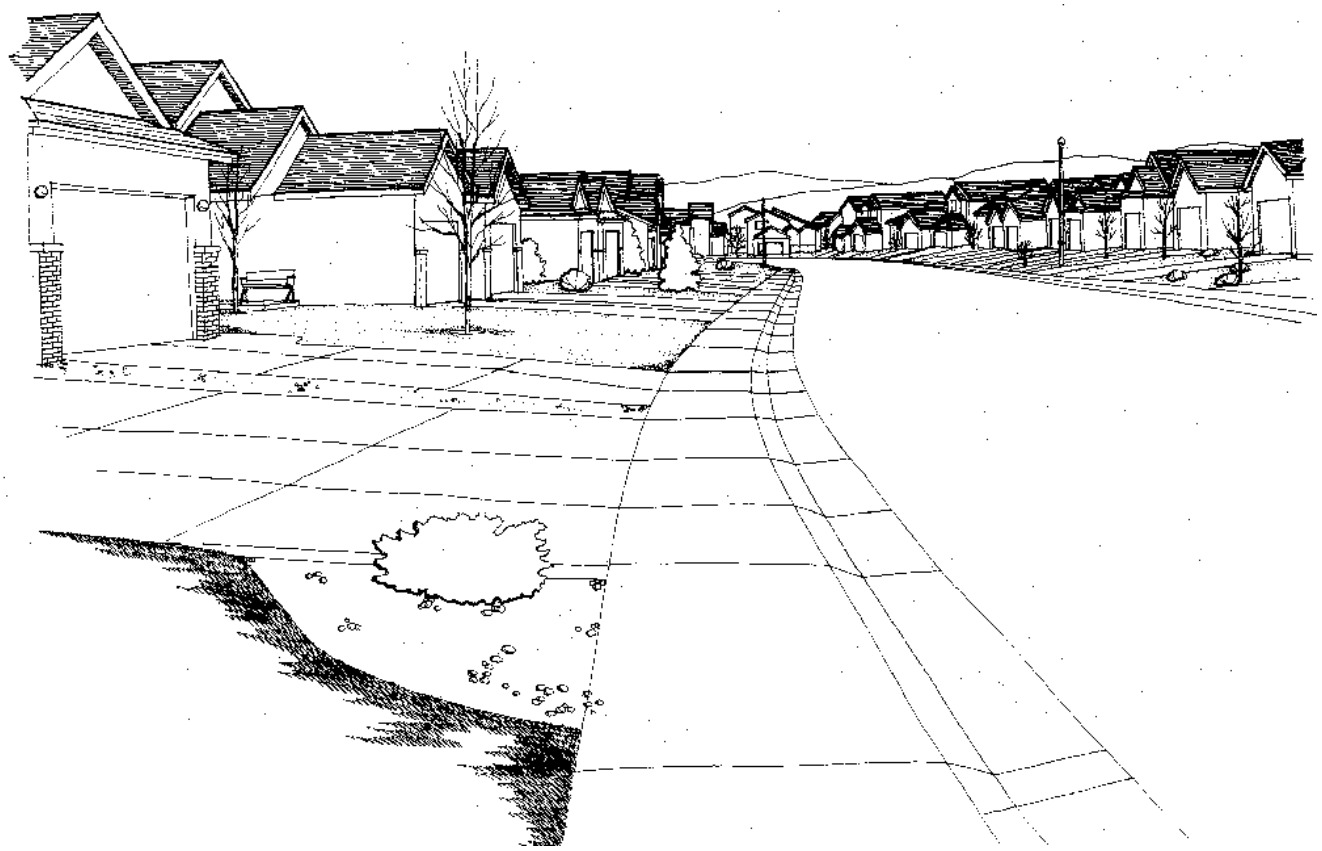
(4) Attached and multi-family dwellings which also face a second street or a connecting walkway spine shall be exempt from subsections (1) through (3) above. The facade oriented to the second street or walkway spine shall include windows, doorways and a structured transition from public to private areas using built elements such as porch features, pediments, arbors, low walls, fences, trellis work and/or similar elements integrated with plantings.

(5) Alternative garage door treatments shall be accepted by the Director if:

(a) the configuration of the lot or other existing physical condition of the lot makes the application of these standards impractical; and

(b) the proposed design substantially meets the intent of this Land Use Code to line streets with active living spaces, create pedestrian-oriented streetscapes and provide variety and visual interest in the exterior design of residential buildings.

Examples & Explanations



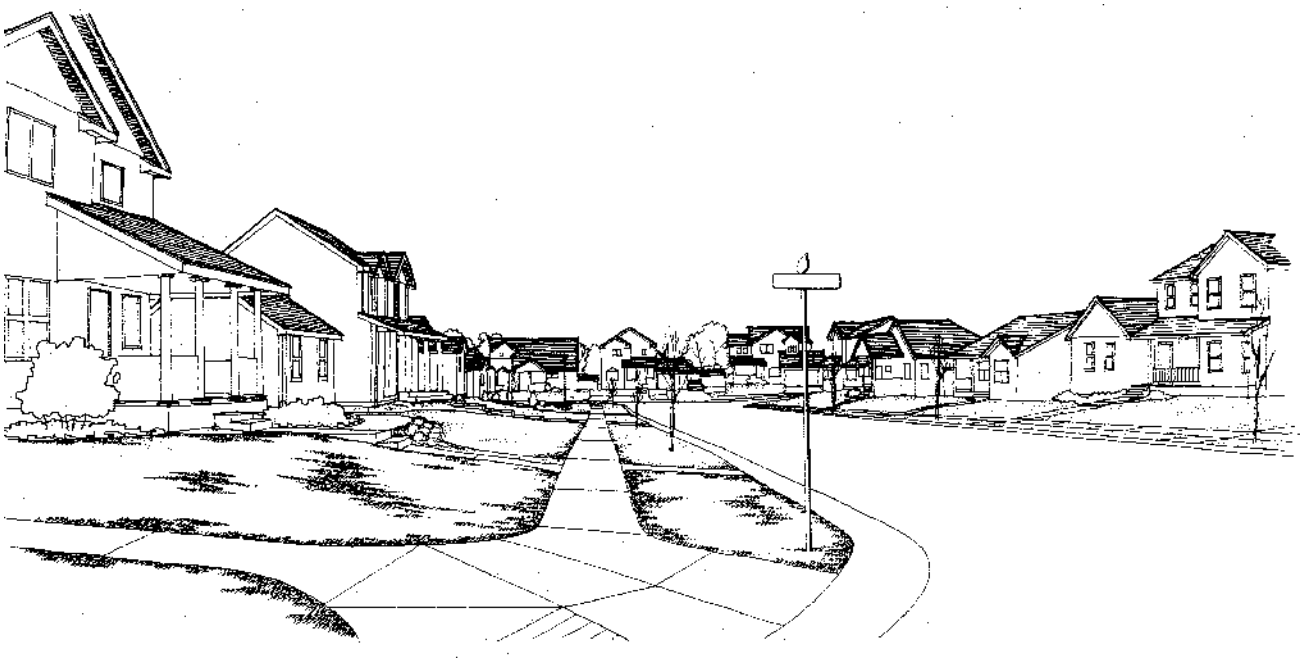
Development designed around cars. Elements are long blocks, driveways, and garages. Extra vehicles, boats, trash cans, storage, and gravel strips are natural additions to scenes like this.

Garage Doors

Q. "Why limit the visual dominance of garage doors along city streets in future new neighborhoods? What problem is solved by having garage doors set back further than the faces of homes?"

A. The standards are a response to the increasing dominance of protruding garage doors as a defining characteristic of new city streets. A lot of the concern about "growth" comes from examples of development where the influences of vehicles, including garages, overwhelm visual quality and the pedestrian environment.

Streets are our most common and most important public spaces – areas which most of us experience every day. They are one of the most significant features of any community. But the design of the pavement itself is only one factor. The building frontage is also a crucial part of a livable street that invites walking, interaction, and attention.



Neighborhood designed around people and visual interest, along with cars. Elements are short blocks, building faces, and tree-lined sidewalks. Rear drives make the foreground of this scene possible. The only natural additions would be an orderly row of parked cars, and people using front yards and porches.

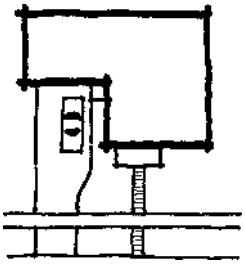
Characteristics of Anywhere, USA – a "lowest common denominator" development approach allows vehicles to determine the impersonal pattern. Above, a garagescape view terminates in a car wash. In general, anonymous arrangements like these discourage walking and elicit speeding and other poor traffic behavior. This has a bunch of implications for community health and livability. Below, people perceive the nature of traffic behavior, and park on the sidewalk. Buildings are only one factor, but they are *a factor.*

It became clear during the *City Plan* process that residents have significant concerns about what Fort Collins is beginning to look like. People were concerned that our city was losing its sense of place and quality of life, and starting to resemble Anywhere, USA.

Citizens voiced concerns about the trend and showed clear support for designs which would reduce the influence of garages on the public space. This allows the friendlier, visually interesting features of homes to dominate the streetscape.

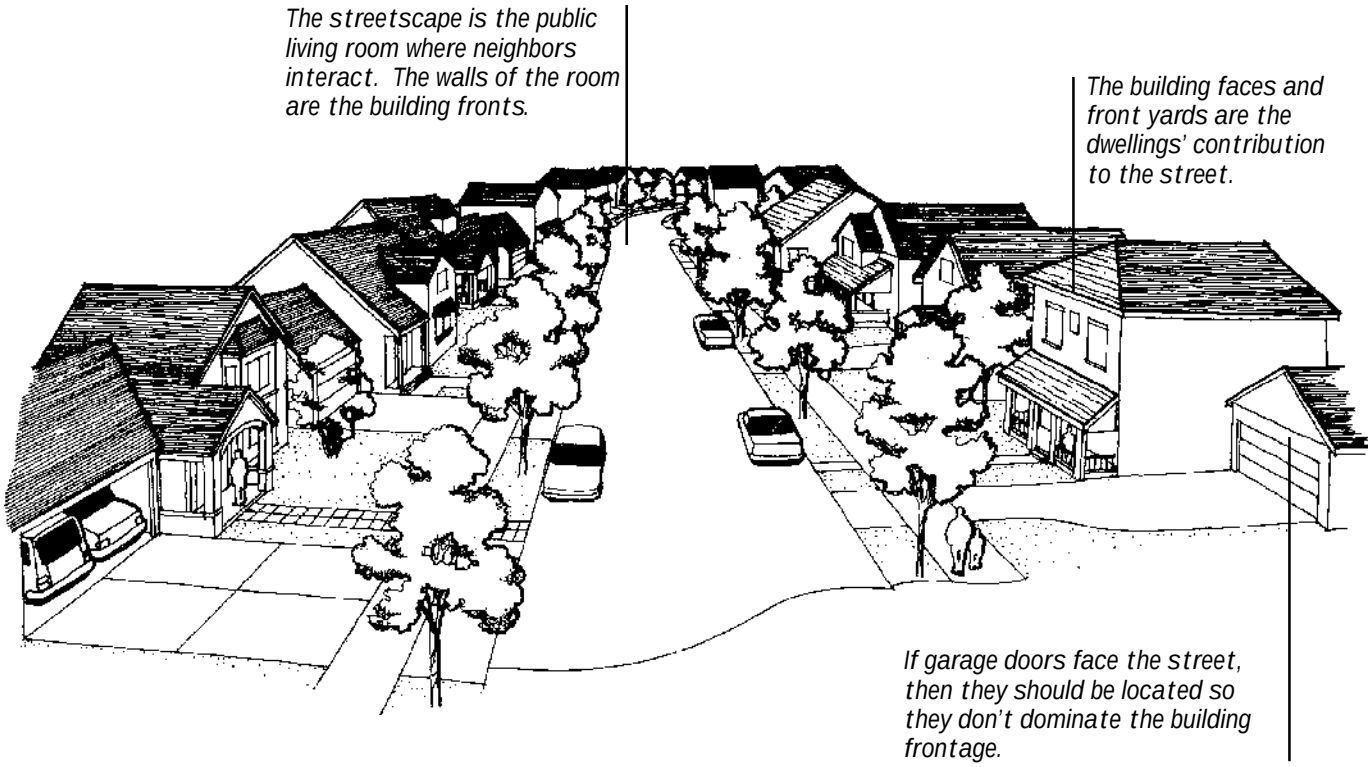
Peter Calthorpe explained the issue in his book The Next American Metropolis:

"An active, pleasant, and safe pedestrian environment is created along streets when residences face the street directly. By recessing garages, more active living areas can overlook the street, allowing residents to keep a watchful eye on playing children and participate in neighborhood activity. This configuration also creates a more human-scaled and less monotonous environment by minimizing the visual impact of large, blank garage doors and by enclosing the street with a variety of architectural elements such as windows, doorways, bays, and porches."



A simple recessed garage facing the street. An entry walk out to the street then makes more sense, further enhancing the relationship of the dwelling to the neighborhood. Driveways can sometimes be narrowed at the curb cut, saving concrete and reducing visual impacts.

The Street



Street Character

Neighborhood street character is determined by the summation of the street itself and yards, porches, and building faces.

Building Frontage

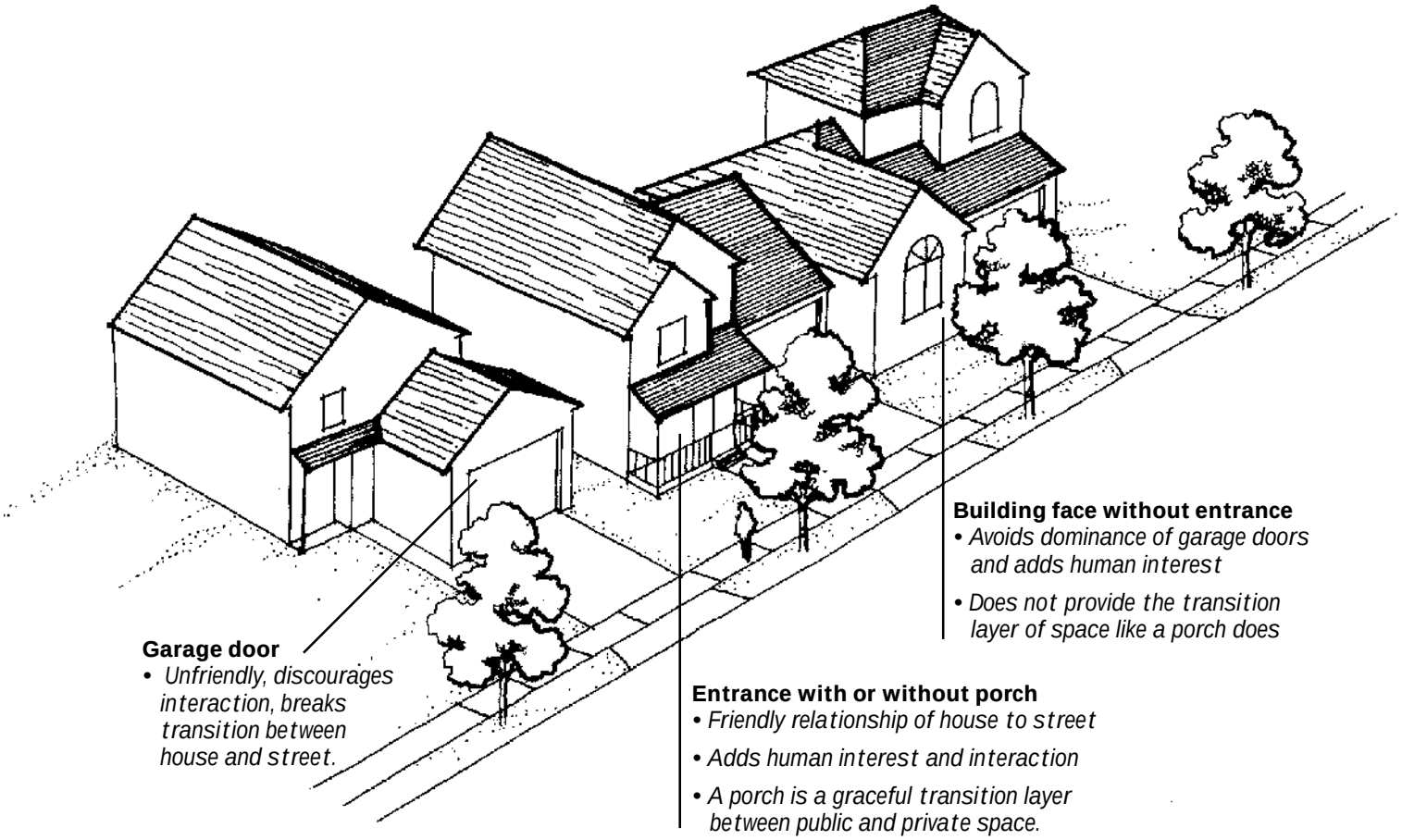
A Basic Premise

A basic premise of City Plan *is that successful neighborhoods with reasonably affordable homes are more likely to be found through acceptable, moderately higher densities and responsive building design, and less likely to be found through development shortcuts in disconnected large-lot subdivisions. The idea is that density requirements can be supported — and marketable — when the garage is recessed or removed from the front face of homes, and buildings are designed to respond appropriately to the context of the neighborhood street.*

Porches

(Encouraged, but not required by the Land Use Code)

A porch is perhaps the best way to make a home and neighborhood welcoming and to give people a comfortable place to sit outside. Ideally, porches should be nearer to the street than any other part of the building, and deep enough for people to sit and still let someone walk by. A porch lets people share their block's outdoor space with their neighbors. This is a different relationship between a building and the neighborhood than the relationship created by garage doors.



Contributions to the Street

Segregated subdivisions and complexes designed around vehicle access to garages and parking lots. City Plan calls on us to confront several aspects of this – "garagescapes" being one aspect.

The garage standards are an integral part of a whole system to shift segregated suburban "growth" designed around cars into more town-like "community development" designed around people, local identity, and rural land conservation.

New streets and neighborhoods that invite attention, interaction, and walking, are keys to the adopted vision and goals for development. Styles will vary, but dealing with vehicles and garages is crucial if we are to meet numerous goals within density requirements. Simply packing car-oriented developments more tightly together was not supported as the way to capture the benefits of a moderate increase in overall density.

Above, building faces and clearly marked entries culminate a pattern of short blocks, curbs, trees, sidewalks, front yards, and entry walks.

Summary Explanation

The garage standards:

- Are an integral part of the whole Land Use Code;
- Address protruding garage doors as a defining characteristic of new city streets;
- Need to be considered in the context of future new streets and neighborhoods which will accommodate about 24,000 forecasted dwelling units on thousands of acres of land over a twenty-year period;
- Were not developed in the context of an individual dwelling or a custom home in an isolated subdivision;
- Are the residential equivalent of commercial building standards to mitigate negative influences of vehicles;
- Are contrary to common portrayals of the individual dwelling as an isolated object in an imaginary void, with no neighbors close by and no street out front;
- Strike a balance between vehicular needs and the reality of cumulative effects on Fort Collins' visual quality and pedestrian environment;
- Were developed through extensive discussion and debate about alternative approaches, in several public processes. The concerns of local builders were explored and given detailed attention, as were broader concerns about what the forecasted growth will be like.

Problems Created by the Standards

The garage requirements cause design changes to many pre-existing floor plans, and others may simply be ruled out. Some developers and builders already take the basic approach and will not be affected. But for most, it looks like the requirements will present new design challenges and opportunities as this issue is considered for the first time. New or updated floor plans may be needed sooner than they otherwise would have been. Design work costs money, as do stock plans available for purchase.

Fortunately, interest in floor plans with garage doors recessed or removed from the front face appears to be growing, with more good plans available each year.

In 1998, First National Bank and the City of Fort Collins sponsored a housing design competition to showcase local design talent and creativity, assist developers and builders in meeting the standards, ease the transition into the new Fort Collins Land Use Code, and produce a book of the plans submitted. The book, called Housing Design Competition Plans, is available free at the Advance Planning Department.

Also, a several-year supply of previously approved lots not subject to the garage standards has provided transition time to update plans for new neighborhoods, as existing plans continue to be built out.

This new house interrupts a long row of houses just like the one on the left. It illustrates the basic shift that local standards represent.

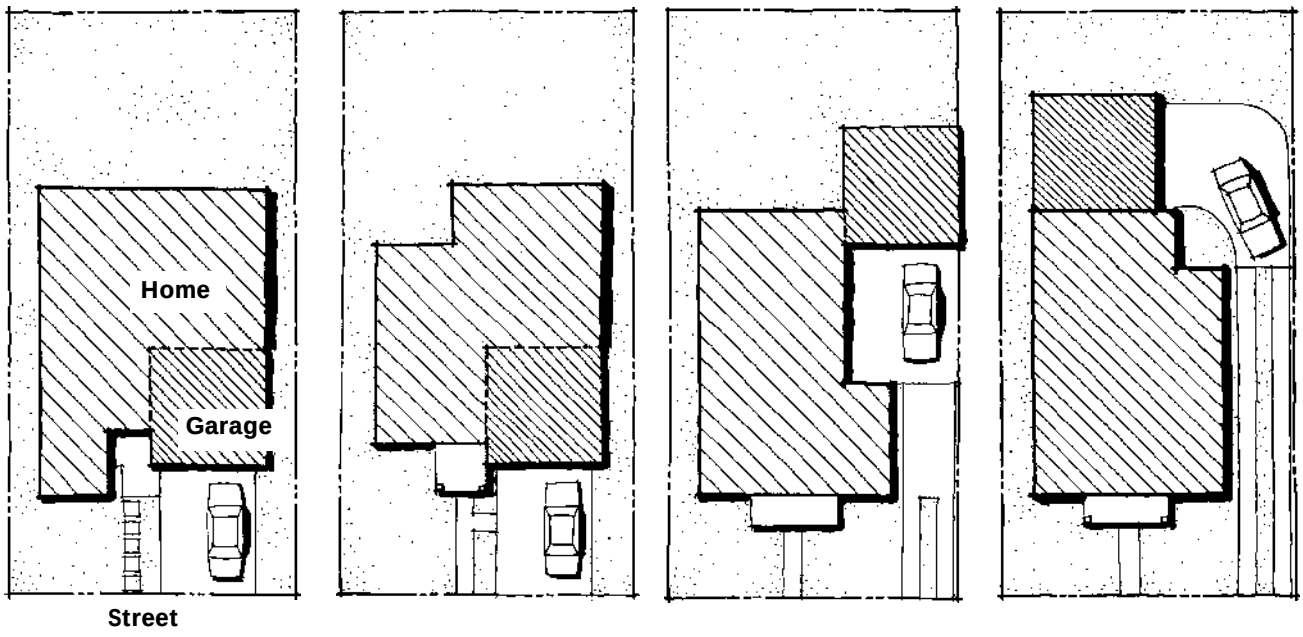
Comparison of neighborhood relationships and visual impacts of forward and recessed garages.

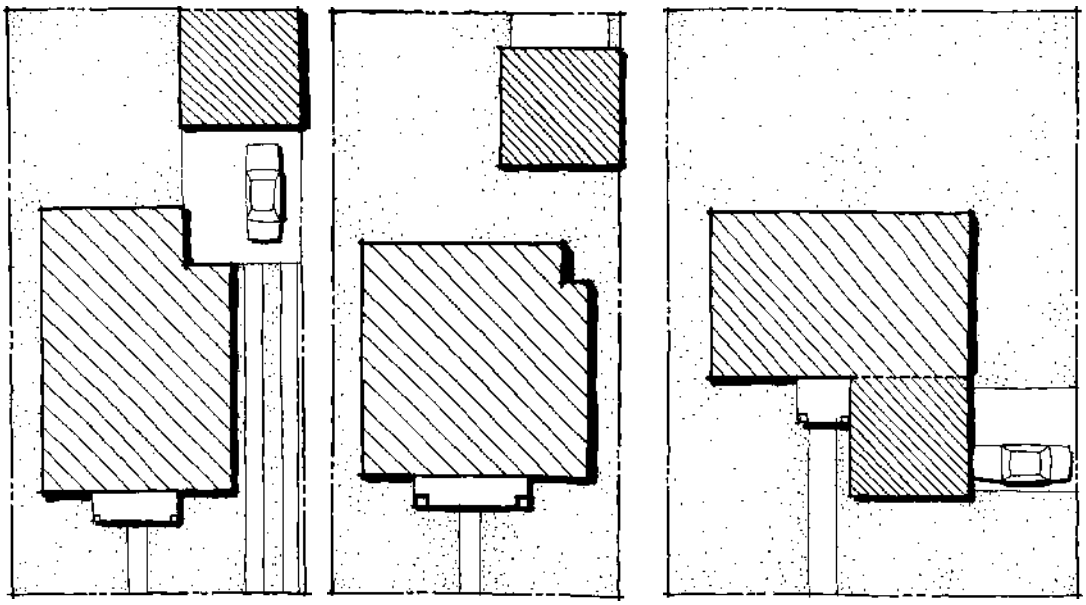
Basic Solutions:

(1) Recessed Front Garages, and (2) Alleys

Specific solutions are as numerous as the number of existing building plans which meet the standard, plus future plans yet to be designed to fit new neighborhoods.

At least 7 basic arrangements meet the standards. Countless variations and floor plans for both detached and attached dwellings can fall into these 7.





Basic Solutions:

Alleys and Rear Access Drives

Alleys are an excellent solution for garages and all that goes with them. They perform a valuable urban function by providing a place for garages and storage of extra vehicles, boats, trailers, trash cans and outdoor equipment. They are especially useful for 3- or more-car garages on city lots. Such rear access leaves the neighborhood street completely free for porches, the faces of homes, and landscaped front yards. This opens up tremendous opportunities for neighborhoods.

New streets like this are possible when garages and driveways are placed to the rear. Alleys like the one below are a key part of the development. The photos show newly completed development in 1999.

A common neighborhood street scene (this one in an established neighborhood). The usefulness of "alleys" is being reconsidered across America as garage doors, driveways, gravel strips, and all that goes with them, take over the fronts of homes and neighborhood streets.

Alleys Not Required

Alleys are not required. *However,* some attached and narrow-lot housing types have a low ratio of street frontage per unit that makes it inherently necessary to have some kind of off-street location for garages (for many apartments, condos, and townhomes, is physically infeasible for every unit to have a street-facing garage).

For some housing types, "alleys" in some form may be considered an *indirect requirement*: that is, if the limitation of garage doors to 50% of the building frontage is the determining reason to include alleys or rear access drives in a development project.

Public Ownership and Maintenance of Alleys

New public residential alleys are limited to one specialized situation: the City will accept ownership responsibility only if the alley is used in tandem with the 24-foot 'Narrow Residential Street' in single family detached housing. This condition is stated in the City's Street Standards, which are not part of the Land Use Code and are available from the Engineering Department. This specialized arrangement only allows parking on one side of the street, and it's only an option for very low-volume streets (700 vehicle trips per day or less).

In other residential situations, the role of alleys can be served by privately owned and maintained rear access drives. This is expected to become more common; several developers have recently chosen to include these in new developments.

Courtesy of Peter Swift Associates Consulting Engineers

Two new examples of development (mid - 1990's), similar and comparable except for the arrangement of the parts and addition of an alley in the example above.

This alley goes with the dwellings at left. Alleys are a key part of a growing number of great new places. This development is part of a whole community effort to turn around and re-focus on long-term health and vibrancy, in Suisun City, California. Does the lower form of development at left look safer for a whole community? Does it even make a real community? The questions and answers will continue to be debated.

The cost of these two forms of development has been shown to be comparable. But the traditional town-like pattern can result in more beautiful neighborhoods and allow more efficient use of land by making mixing and moderate densities more acceptable.

Rear access forms quiet back yard spaces.

Simple rear access with detached garages.

New alley provides utility and construction access.

Above, a safe, valuable new neighborhood with alleys is full of solutions to city problems in Norfolk, Va. The design of this development was to ***improve*** *security in an anonymous area. Police officers living here park on the street; there are no fences; pride is evident; values are rising; more similar projects are being pursued.*

3-car garages leave neighborhood streets free for sidewalks, yards, and generous home fronts.

Alley view of a new back yard

Back yard view of a new alley

Examples of new alleys with trappings that would otherwise mark the street character.

Visibility and security can be maintained with some pleasing low level lighting, thoughtful fence design or no fences, landscape treatments, and the presence of people, whether in living space above garages or just generally using the alley and back yards. Attention, pride, and moderate visibility are the keys to natural security, whether in new neighborhoods with alleys or conventional subdivisions.

Problems with Alleys & Keys to Success

There is some concern that new alleys will result in crime and decay. In contrast to this concern, a planning premise is that new alleys can be appropriately lighted, safe, and useful for residents. Basic design can prevent alleys from being too dark, neglected, or hidden. Design should address buildings, driveways, lighting, and landscaping. Ironically, some new alleys look and work about like the streets in other recent subdivisions.

We can look at the legacy of interesting, comfortable streets in our older downtown neighborhoods. These neighborhoods, alleys included, are prized by the market and beloved by their residents, even though design and security were never considered.

Alleys or shared rear driveways typically add more pavement in detached housing developments, thus adding cost and maintenance needs. Private associations are needed to deal with the maintenance of any private rear driveways. These are tradeoffs in the shift toward more compact community design.

Some developers who have recently included alleys in projects suggest that the cost is not necessarily a deciding factor. Once the decision is made to include alleys or rear driveways, they are simply factored into the land development/lot cost equation along with all other access improvements. They are interrelated with other factors like density, lot size, utility coordination, neighborhood character, and significant garage options. For example, one development offered the option of deferring garage construction to lower the cost of entry into the market; others offer options for additional living units.

For developers and cities who have risked a shift to traditional neighborhood developments, alleys and their equivalents have been part of success in making great places. More and more projects are providing valuable models. The solutions may soon be commonplace. The term 'alley' may be the biggest problem.

Basic Solutions:

Recessed Street-Facing Garages

Garages placed behind the front facades of homes and porches. Examples are common and possibilities wide open in terms of dwelling types, styles, and details. Above, faces of houses frame a green square. Below, house fronts are part of a new neighborhood designed to support walking and interaction, as well as auto access.




Four simple recessed garages.


Two detached garages — with a large new home and a modest older cottage.

Attached, side-access garage behind the home.

Detached garage with a parking court.

Creative Alternatives

Like all standards, modifications to the garage standards can be reviewed on a case by case basis. That is, if a proposed design doesn't or can't meet the stated numerical requirements, it can be weighed against the purpose of the standards and the intent to line streets with active living spaces, create pedestrian-oriented streetscapes and provide variety and visual interest in the exterior design of residential buildings.

This example building has two garage doors that are not recessed. But the one-car-wide doors have covered balconies overhanging them, and architectural fencing and landscaping add detail and interest.

End Examples and Explanation of 3.5.2(E)