

City of Orange, CA
Saturday, February 28, 2026

Title 17. Zoning

Chapter 17.10. SPECIFIC ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES

§ 17.10.070. Design Review.

- A. Purpose and Intent. The design review process is established to provide a means of reviewing development projects to ensure that these projects are compatible with community aesthetics including architectural design, massing and scale, context, color palette, signage and landscaping. The design review process serves a primary role in the implementation of adopted design standards. The City's design objective is to enhance the community character and identity of the City by promoting diversity, creativity and cohesiveness in the development of property, building structures, site relationships and landscape through quality design.
- B. When Design Review Is Required. Design review is required for all projects listed below:
1. Development projects requiring Planning Commission or City Council approval;
 2. Any project requiring major site plan review;
 3. Signs as specified in Chapter **17.36**;
 4. All projects within Old Towne or other historic districts as established, except where otherwise exempted by adopted design standards and/or adopted specific plan(s);
 5. External remodeling of commercial, industrial, institutional and large scale multiple family developments, except where otherwise exempted by City codes, including adopted design standards and/or adopted specific plan(s) including:
 - a. Facade renovation of the majority of a multi-family residential complex, multi-tenant commercial or industrial center, or institutional property.
 - b. Introduction of new structural architectural elements to the facade of individual in-line or freestanding pad tenants within a multi-tenant commercial or industrial center where such elements project more than 12 inches from any exterior wall plane.
 6. Projects subject to minor site plan review that also involve exterior remodeling of residential, commercial, industrial, and institutional development.
 7. Exception. Units created in a single-family (R-1) residential zone pursuant to SB 9 shall not require design review but shall instead meet all objective design review standards specified in Section 17.13.040.GGG and Chapter **17.14**.
- C. Initiation and Application. Design review applications shall be filed in accordance with application and submittal requirements. Application materials may include site, building and landscape plans, photographs, colored elevations and/or renderings and color and material boards. This information must be of sufficient detail to allow the reviewing body to determine the compatibility of the change to the existing structure, area, or district and that the project meets established design standards and criteria. In addition, to comply with provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act, most

projects in historic districts will require an application for environmental review in accordance with Section **17.08.030**. Submittal materials shall also include information pertaining to scale, massing, streetscape, landscaping and open space.

- D. Design Review Procedure and Criteria. When a matter or application meets the Historic Threshold, the Design Review Committee shall make a recommendation or final determination as authorized by Section 17.08.020.D to approve, approve with conditions or deny a project at a public meeting. In making such recommendation or determination, the Committee shall consider adopted design standards and guidelines (where applicable), the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Rehabilitation (where applicable) and the following general criteria in making a project determination:

The project shall have an internally consistent, integrated design theme which is reflected in the following elements:

1. Architectural Features.

- a. The architectural features shall reflect a similar design style or period.
- b. Creative building elements and identifying features should be used to create a high quality project with visual interest and an architectural style.

2. Landscape.

- a. The type, size and location of landscape materials shall support the project's overall design concept.
- b. Landscaping shall not obstruct visibility of required addressing, nor shall it obstruct the vision of motorists or pedestrians in proximity to the site.
- c. Landscape areas shall be provided in and around parking lots to break up the appearance of large expanses of hardscape.

3. Signage. All signage shall be compatible with the building(s) design, scale, colors, materials and lighting.

4. Secondary Functional and Accessory Features. Trash receptacles, storage and loading areas, transformers and mechanical equipment shall be screened in a manner which is architecturally compatible with the principal building(s).

E. Administrative Design Review.

1. Purpose and Intent. The administrative design review process is established to allow for a simplified review process for specific types of new development, exterior building alterations, and sign modifications which the City anticipates will not adversely affect surrounding properties.

2. Actions Eligible for Administrative Design Review. The following types of projects are eligible for administrative design review:

- a. Projects subject to minor site plan review that also involve exterior remodeling of residential, commercial, industrial, and institutional development that is not visible from the public right-of-way.
- b. Projects that involve exterior remodeling of an individual free-standing commercial, industrial, or institutional building on an individual parcel that is not part of a larger center or campus, including changes in exterior building material, roof form, and window or door openings.
- c. Infill residential development as specified in the City of Orange Infill Residential Design Guidelines.

- d. Modifications to existing sign programs that involve changes in color, font style, height, width, method of illumination or sign area that are otherwise in compliance with the provisions of Chapter **17.36**.
 3. Initiation and Application. Applications for administrative design review shall be filed in accordance with submittal requirements as determined by the Community Development Director. Additional information may be requested from an applicant to allow for thorough design review of a project.
 4. Procedure and Criteria. The Community Development Director, pursuant to Section **17.08.020**, shall be responsible for administrative design review. Once an application for administrative design review has been deemed complete, the Community Development Director shall consider and approve, deny or refer the project to the Design Review Committee. In making such determination, the Community Development Director shall consider adopted design standards and guidelines where applicable, the general criteria set forth in Section **17.10.070(D)**, and the findings required in Sections 17.10.070(G)(3) and (4). Appeals of decisions by the Community Development Director shall be made in accordance with the City appeal procedures set forth in Section **17.08.050**. Notification of administrative design review shall be in accordance with Section **17.08.040** and community development noticing procedures.
- F. Conditions of Approval. The reviewing body may require reasonable conditions of approval to mitigate potential aesthetic impacts of a project. These conditions may include, but are not limited to, the following:
1. Modifications to building height, bulk, scale, mass and placement;
 2. Changes in building materials and color palette;
 3. Screening of parking areas, trash receptacles, storage areas, mechanical equipment;
 4. Changes to the location and use of plants in required landscape areas to mitigate community concerns.
- G. Findings Required. The reviewing body shall make findings for all projects based upon design criteria stated above. A specific finding shall be made for projects as follows:
1. When a matter or application meets the Historic Threshold, the proposed work conforms to the prescriptive standards and design criteria referenced and/or recommended by the Design Review Committee or other reviewing body for the project.
 2. In any National Register Historic District, the proposed work complies with the Secretary of the Interior's standards and guidelines.
 3. The project design upholds community aesthetics through the use of an internally consistent, integrated design theme and is consistent with all adopted specific plans, applicable design standards and their required findings.
 4. For infill residential development, as specified in the City of Orange infill residential design guidelines, the new structure(s) or addition are compatible with the scale, massing, orientation, and articulation of the surrounding development and will preserve or enhance existing neighborhood character.
- H. Expiration. If not utilized, project approval expires two years from the approval date. Extensions of time may be granted in accordance with Section **17.08.060**.
(Prior code 17.96.020, 17.96.100, 17.96.110, 17.96.130; Ord. 4-74; Ord. 20-82; Ord. 4-87; Ord. 16-94; Ord. 12-95; Ord. 15-98; Ord. 10-99; Ord. 8-04; Ord. 09-13, 2013; Ord. 17-21, 2022; Ord. 15-23, 11/14/2023; Ord. 18-25, 11/12/2025)