

Missing Middle LA: City of Los Angeles

Objective Design Standards for Small Lot Homes



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Introduction:

In 2005, the City of Los Angeles adopted the Small Lot Subdivision Ordinance (“Small Lot Ordinance”) which permitted fee-simple homeownership of homes located on conventionally smaller lots and in zones where apartment units would be permitted by-right. These small lot projects benefitted from reduced minimum lot sizes, relaxed or eliminated setback and passageway requirements, and eliminated standardized open space and guest parking requirements. For the past 20 years, small lot projects have emerged as a hybrid of single- and multi-family housing typologies and have proven to serve as a more affordable and attainable alternative to single-family homes.

With the adoption of California’s Starter Home Revitalization Act (AB 684/ SB 1123), the State has effectively expanded Los Angeles’s existing Small Lot Ordinance to allow small lot projects in all zones, including within single-family zones. While state law explicitly prevents cities from introducing new development standards that may have the effect of limiting new housing, the City has responded to the State by introducing an alternative pathway for projects, offering the Starter Home Bonus Program in lieu that allows for increased development potential in exchange for compliance with objective design standards. Therefore, for the purposes of this document, the term “Small Lot Project” refers to a project developed either through the Small Lot Subdivision Ordinance or those utilizing the Starter Home Bonus Program. Small Lot Projects include the construction, reconstruction, rehabilitation, relocation, alteration of any building or structure which requires the issuance of a demolition permit, grading permit, or building permit.

Application of Design Standards:

The Small Lot Design Standards create objective, specific, and enforceable criteria for the design of all Small Lot Projects. The Design Standards include three sections:

- a. Site Design
- b. Building Design; and
- c. Landscaping

Types of Small Lot Projects:

Small Lot Projects can take a variety of forms depending on the site, or desired density. These projects can range from lower-density configurations of detached homes (Image A) to more compact attached housing types, allowing a project to respond to different lot sizes and neighborhood contexts.

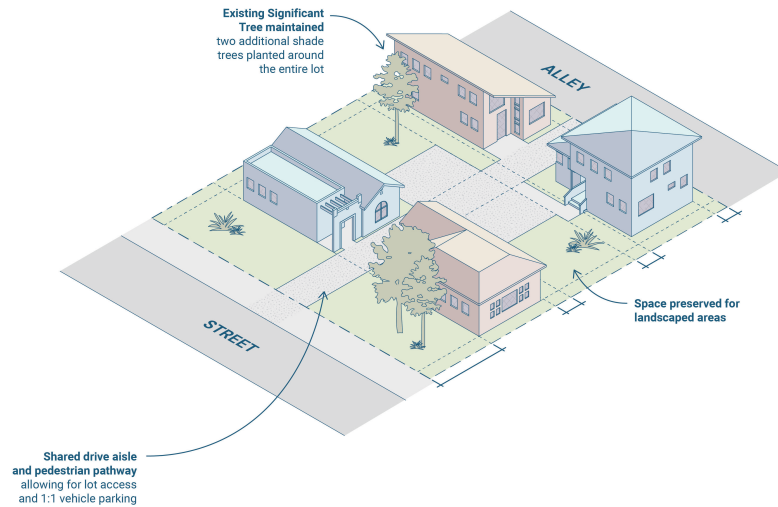


Image A
Low Density Detached Small Lots Homes

Bungalow courts (Image B) consist of a group of small, detached or semi-detached homes arranged around a shared central courtyard or landscaped open space.

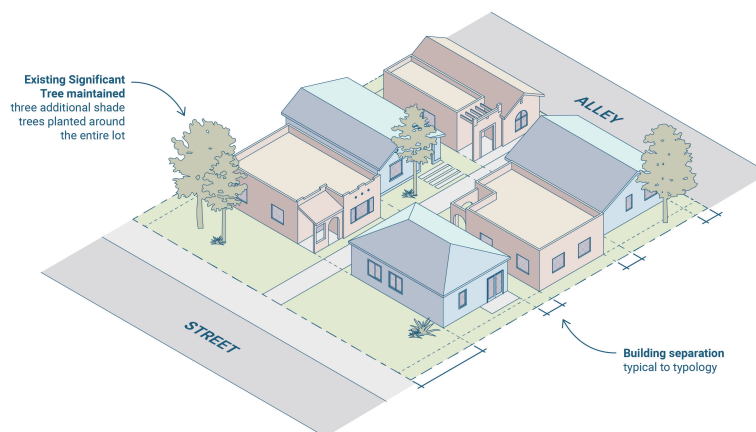


Image B
Bungalow Court

A townhome development (Image C) consists of multiple multi-story homes that are individually occupied and typically share one or more walls with neighboring units. Each townhome generally has its own private entrance and may include private outdoor space or a garage.

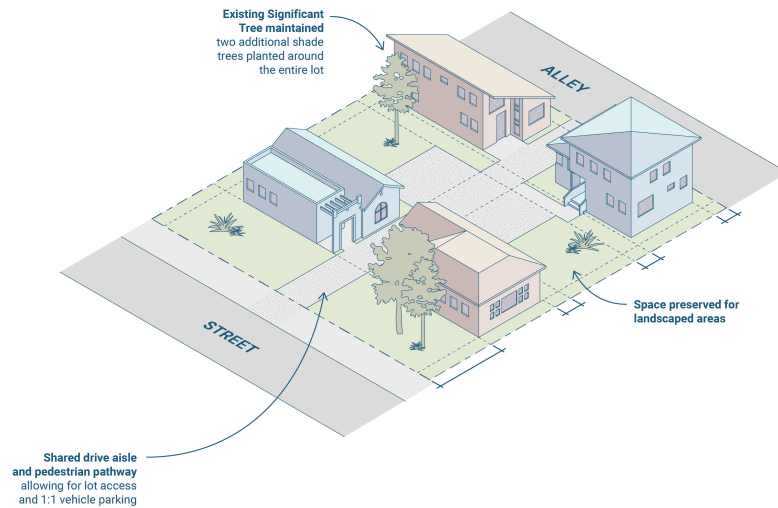


Image C
Detached Small Lots Homes

All new Small Lot Projects must comply with Sections A through C. If new dwellings are added to a bungalow court or existing small lot project, they must also comply with Sections A through C.

Administrative Clearance Process:

All Small Lot Projects are required to comply with the Objective Design Standards for Small Lot Homes through an Administrative Clearance process.

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A.

Site Design

A. Site Design

Pedestrian Connectivity and Access

1. Dwelling Orientation

- a. **Lots Facing a Public Right-of-Way:** Small Lots abutting the public right-of-way shall orient the primary entrance toward the public right-of-way. Bungalow court developments are exempt from this requirement. The primary entrances of homes within a bungalow court may face a central court, common open space, or shared pedestrian pathway.
 - i. For Small Lot Homes facing a public right-of-way, a continuous pedestrian pathway shall be provided from the public sidewalk to each primary entrance.
 - 1. Where a physical site constraint (e.g., a Significant Tree) makes orientation of the primary entrance toward the public right-of-way infeasible, the development shall provide a clearly identifiable pedestrian entrance from a central court, common open space, or shared pedestrian pathway. Where the pedestrian route is located within or parallel to a common access driveway, it shall be distinguished from the vehicular area as described in **Section 1.b.ii.** below.
- b. **Interior Lots:** Small Lots located within the interior of a subdivision shall orient their primary entrances toward a pedestrian pathway connected to the public right-of-way. Each entrance shall be clearly visible from the central pedestrian pathway.
 - i. Shared pedestrian pathways may not cross vehicle access lanes.
 - ii. Pedestrian access may be provided as a dedicated pedestrian path and/or a path shared with vehicle access lanes only where pathways meet one of the following conditions:
 - 1. The pathway is physically separated from the drive aisle by a vertical element. Vertical elements may include curbs, bollards, landscaping, or raised pathways with rolled curb edges; or
 - 2. The pathway is visually delineated within the vehicle access lane through a change in paving material, painted striping, or contrasting stamped or colored concrete.
- c. **Alley-Facing Lots:** Small Lots abutting an alley may either orient the primary entrance toward the alley or provide a direct connection from the primary entrance to a pedestrian pathway leading to a public right-of-way.

Section 1. Dwelling Orientation

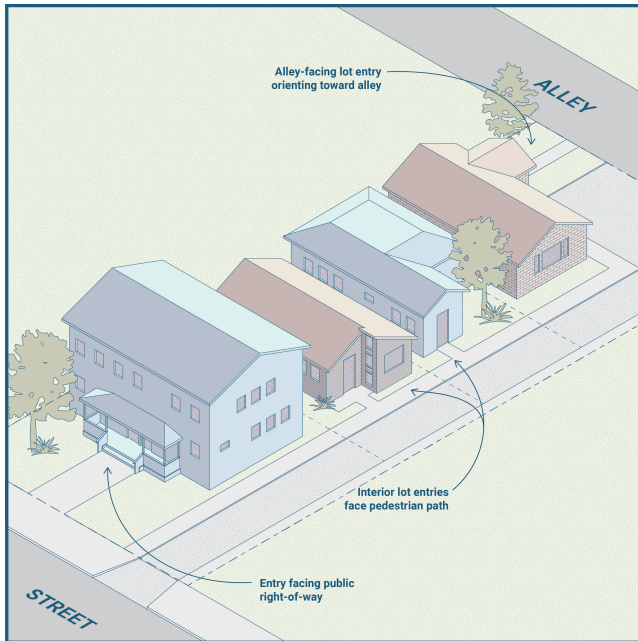


Image 1
Dwelling Orientation

Front-facing Small Lot Homes orient their primary entrances toward the public right-of-way, interior homes orient toward a connected pedestrian pathway, and alley-facing homes may orient toward the alley or connect directly to a pedestrian route leading to the public right-of-way.

Section 2. Primary Entryways

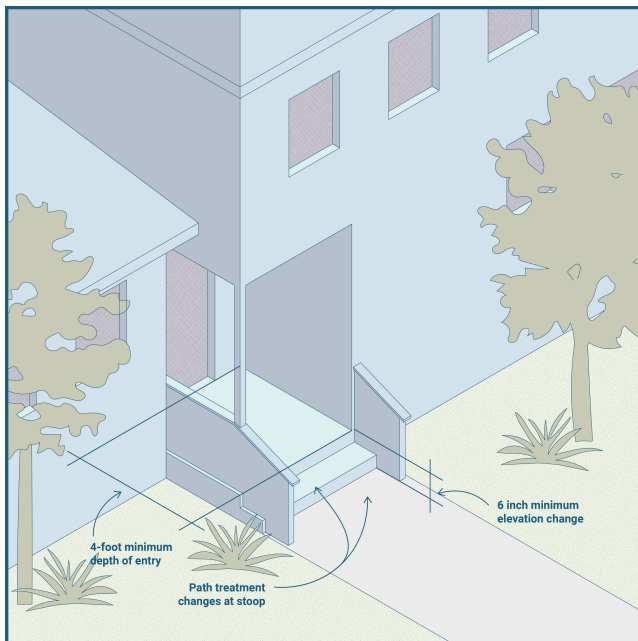


Image 2
Primary Entryways Diagram

This primary entry incorporates a landscaped area between the pedestrian pathway and a recessed, elevated stoop, creating a clearly identifiable and articulated entrance.

2. Primary Entryways

- a. All Small Lot Homes shall have an identifiable primary entryway. Each primary entryway shall provide the address or unit identification, lighting to illuminate the entry area, and a landing area where there is a change in grade from the pedestrian pathway.
- b. All primary entryways shall incorporate at least two of the following elements:
 - i. A covered entry at a minimum four feet depth, equal to or greater than the width of the entry door. This can be achieved through a recess in the building's mass, or through a projecting porch, portico, deck, awning, or another type of covered entry.
 - ii. A change in elevation through a stoop, landing, or porch. Where a change in elevation is used, it shall be no less than one standard stair step (approximately six inches).
 - iii. A patio, deck, or landscaped area located between the pedestrian pathway and the primary entryway. The area may be unenclosed or enclosed by a low fence or wall no more than 36 inches in height and must be accessible from the common pedestrian pathway or, when facing a public right-of-way, from the public sidewalk.

3. Vehicular Circulation

a. Driveway Location and Configuration

- ii. Where a Small Lot Project is accessed from an alley or internal drive aisle, garage and parking access may be located along that alley or internal circulation route.
- iii. Vehicular parking shall not encroach upon or obstruct any required pedestrian pathway.

b. Vehicle Access Lane Paving and Landscaping

- i. Vehicle access lanes shall incorporate at least one of the following:
 - 1. Permeable paving over at least 50 percent of the access lane area. Permeable paving may include permeable pavers, porous concrete or asphalt, open-grid paving, or another paving system designed to allow water infiltration.
 - 2. A landscaped strip at least 18 inches wide, located either down the center of the access aisle (e.g., a Hollywood Driveway) or along its length; or
 - 3. Drainage directed from the driveway to an onsite landscaped area, bioswale, infiltration planter, or other stormwater-management feature.

c. Sidewalk Continuity Across Driveways

- i. The pedestrian path of travel along a public sidewalk shall continue across each driveway at the same elevation as the adjoining sidewalk.
- ii. The sidewalk paving material, color, and pattern shall continue across the driveway apron.
- iii. Driveway slopes and grade transitions shall occur outside the required clear width of the public sidewalk, except as otherwise required.

d. Garage Location and Orientation

- i. The combined width of street-facing garage-door openings shall not exceed 75 percent of the width of the building facade on which they are located.
- ii. A garage-door opening serving one parking space shall not exceed 12 feet in width; a garage-door opening serving two adjacent parking spaces shall not exceed 20 feet in width.

Section 3. Vehicular Circulation

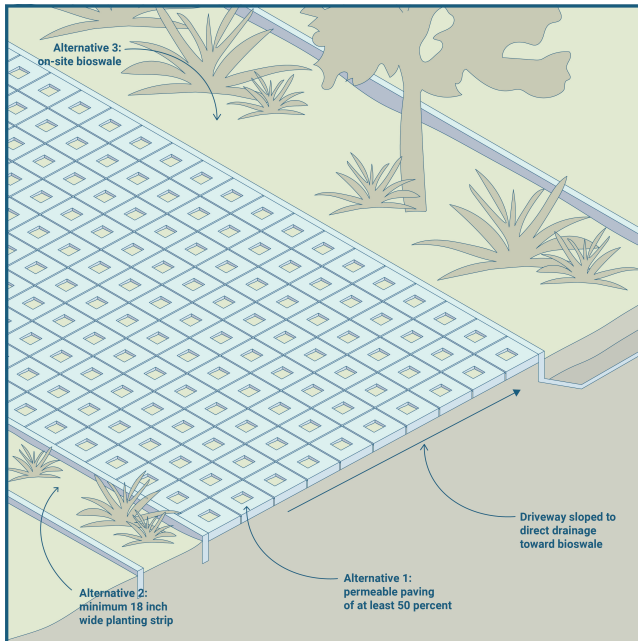


Image 3
Vehicular Circulation

Permeable paving covers at least 50 percent of the access lane area and may be combined with an 18-inch-wide landscaped strip or drainage directed to an onsite landscaped area, bioswale, infiltration planter, or other stormwater-management feature.

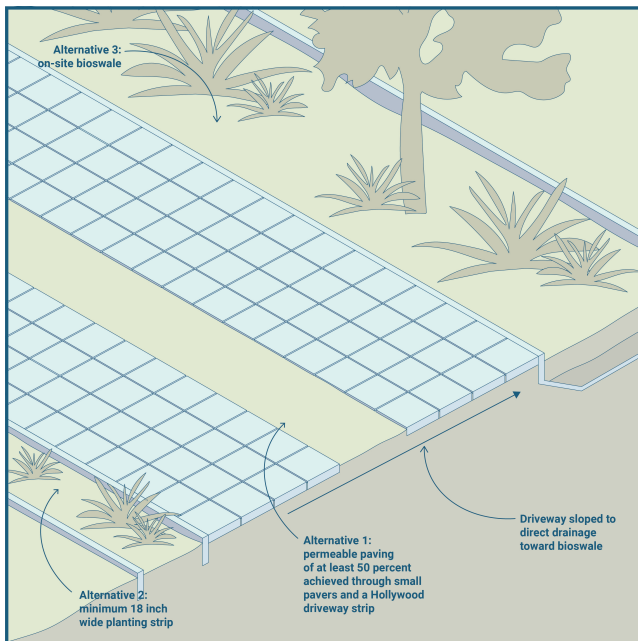


Image 4
Vehicular Circulation Diagram with "Hollywood driveway"

Similar to Image 3, this diagram illustrates three potential approaches to vehicular access, replacing permeable paving with a landscaped strip located between the paved wheel paths, as is typical of a Hollywood driveway.

4. Site Amenities and Common Open Space Areas (Projects of 20 Units or More)

- a. Small Lot Projects shall provide short-term bicycle parking consistent with LAMC Section 12.21.A.16. Projects that do not provide vehicular parking spaces shall provide either short-term or long-term bicycle parking at a ratio of one bicycle parking space per lot.
- b. Lot Amenity Space, when serving the entire project and accessible to all residents, shall incorporate one site amenity as listed on the Director's Amenity Features Menu.
- c. Required Common Open Space required by the Small Lot Map Standards for Projects of 20 units or more (12.21 G) must:
 - i. Be located outdoors and have no structures that project into the common open space area, except as provided in Section 12.22 C.20 (b) and Section 12.21.A.25.
 - ii. Be located at grade level, contiguous or connected, and accessible to all residents of the site.
 - iii. Have a minimum area of 300 sqft with no horizontal dimension less than 15 feet when measured perpendicular from any point on each of the boundaries of the open space area. Driveways, parking spaces, or pedestrian pathways cannot be counted toward the open space requirement. However, side rear and front yards may be included provided that they meet the minimum area and dimension requirement above.
 - iv. Be designed to accommodate at least three amenities as listed on the Director's Amenity Features Menu.

B.

Building Design

B. Building Design

1. Building Configuration, Facade Articulation, and Exterior Materials

a. Building Configuration

- i. Small Lot Homes shall be grouped into clusters of no more than six homes to avoid an uninterrupted building wall with no breaks. A break of six feet shall be required for each cluster of six Small Lot Homes in a single continuous row or for each length of 180 linear feet, whichever is smaller.
- ii. Clusters of Small Lot Homes shall be separated by a minimum six-foot-wide building gap designed with landscaping, open space, common walkways, or a combination thereof.
 1. This does not include areas solely dedicated to vehicle access lanes, unless they include one of the treatments listed in the sentence above.

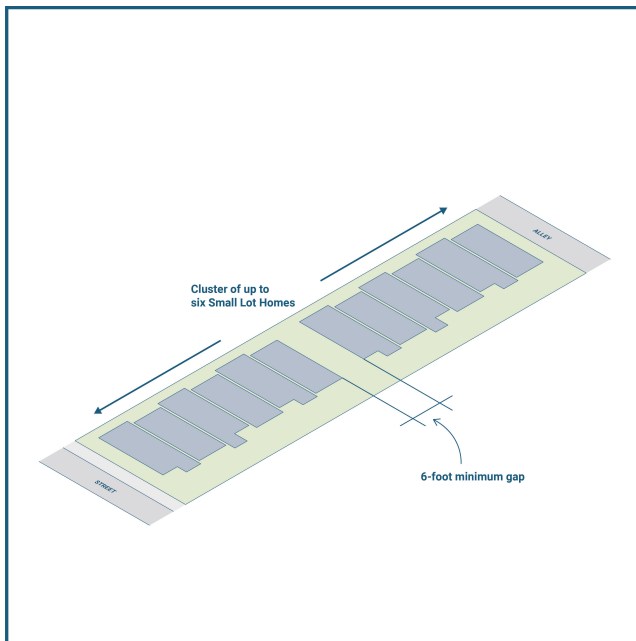


Image 5
Building Configuration

Small Lot Homes are grouped into clusters of no more than six homes, with a minimum six-foot-wide break between clusters or every 180 linear feet, whichever is less.

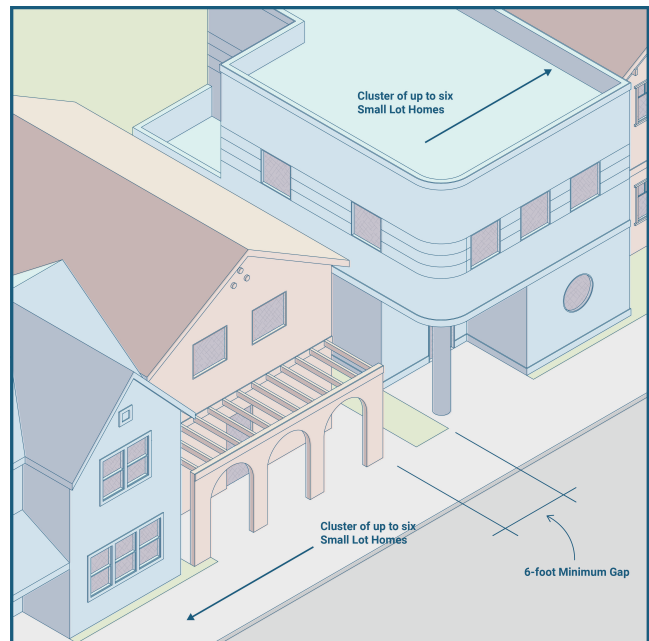


Image 6
Building Configuration Zoom

The breaks between clusters of Small Lot Homes incorporate landscaping, open space, common walkways, or a combination of these features to prevent long, uninterrupted building walls.

b. Facade Articulation

- i. All building facades facing a public right-of-way, a project perimeter, and all portions of exterior building elevations located more than seven feet from an adjacent Small Lot Home shall incorporate at least two of the following facade articulation techniques:
 1. A facade offset, projection, or recess at least six inches deep, extending at least 10 feet vertically or horizontally;
 2. A porch, balcony, bay window, canopy, awning, terrace, or similar element projecting at least 12 inches;
 3. Columns, pilasters, fins, or similar vertical elements projecting at least six inches from the facade and spaced no more than 10 feet apart;
 4. Trim, reveals, sills, headers, cornices, or similar detailing projecting or recessed at least two inches.

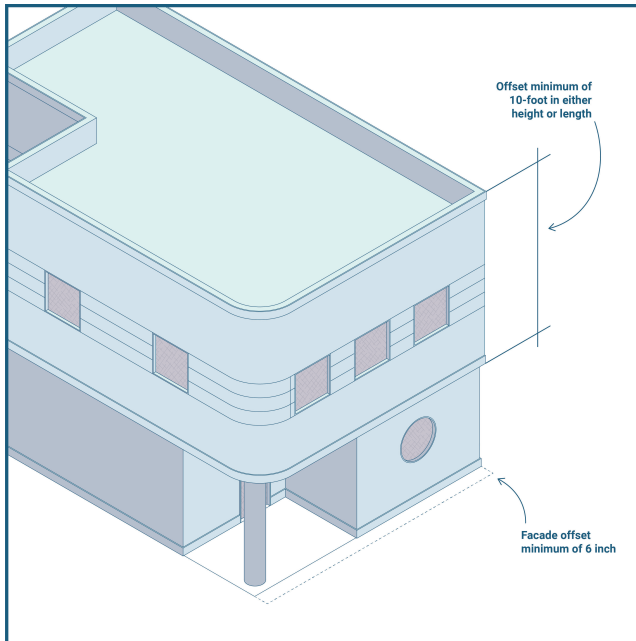


Image 7
Facade Articulation Section 1.b.i.1

A facade break of a minimum of six inches and extending 10 feet in either height or width.

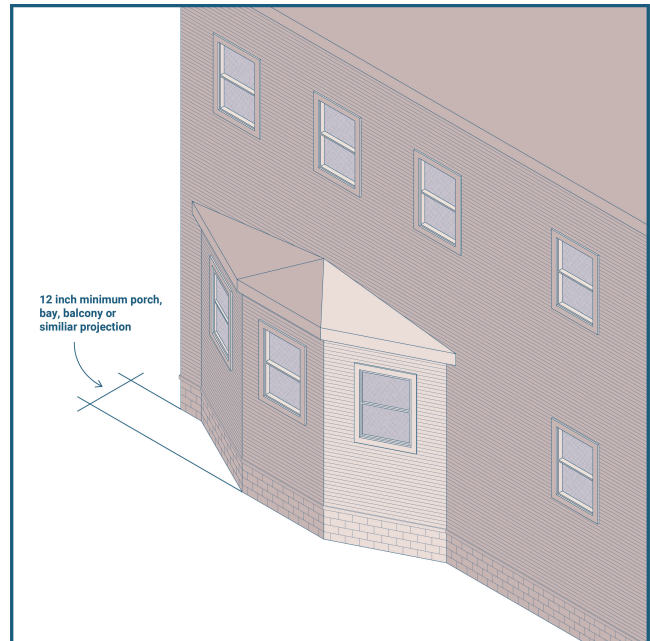


Image 8
Facade Articulation Section 1.b.i.2

A bay projection of no less than 12 inches breaks up the facade of a Small Lot Home.

Section 1.b Facade Articulation

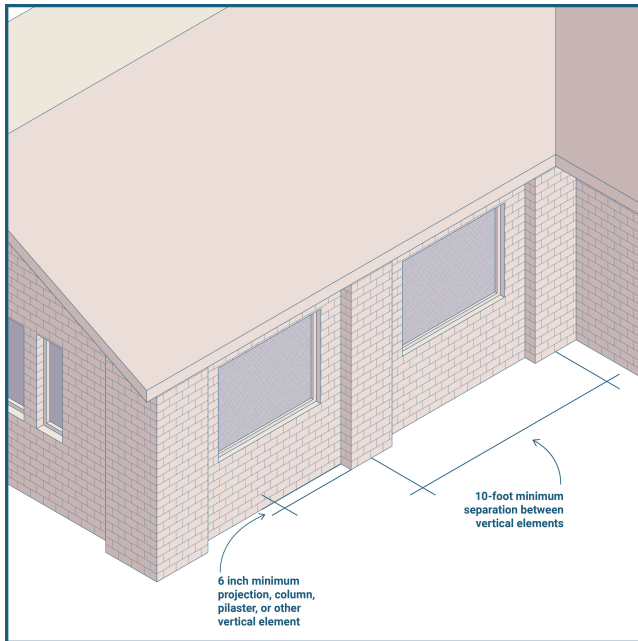


Image 9
Facade Articulation Section 1.b.i.3

Pilasters establish rhythm and break up the otherwise continuous facade.

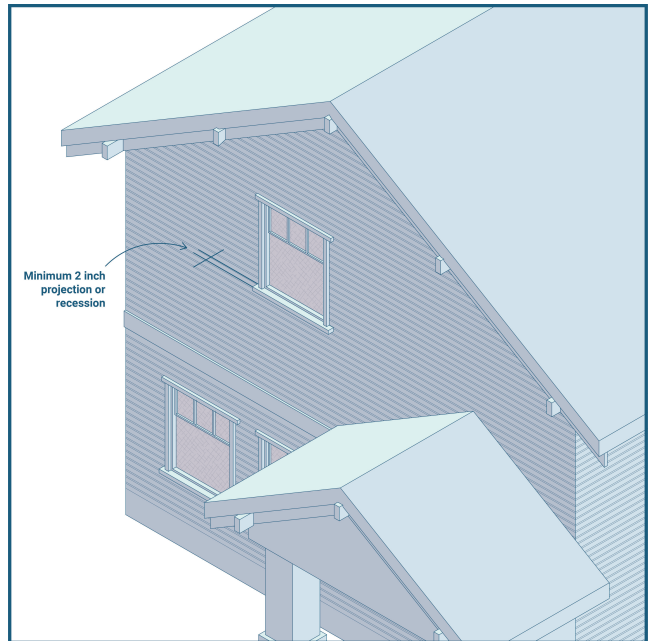


Image 10
Facade Articulation Section 1.b.i.4

A Small Lot Home incorporating projecting trim, sills, and headers that extend more than two inches from the building's facade.

Section 1.c Exterior Materials

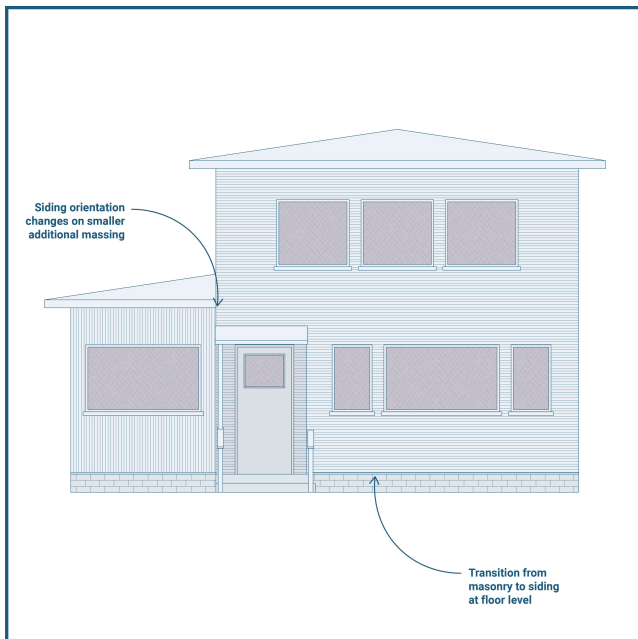


Image 11
Exterior Materials

This Small Lot Home transitions from masonry to siding at the first-floor level, with the siding changing orientation to further distinguish the smaller, single-story building form.

c. Exterior Materials

- i. Change in exterior building materials to include at least two distinct building facade materials.
- ii. Material transitions shall align with building massing, changes in plane, openings, inside corners, floor lines, bays, or other architectural features.
- iii. Materials terminating at outside corners shall return at least 24 inches onto the adjacent facade.

2. Windows and Openings

- a. Each facade facing a public right-of-way shall have a glazed area of at least 20 percent.
- b. South- and west-facing windows shall have an overhang, awning, canopy, or similar shading element projecting at least 12 inches.
- c. Upper-story windows facing an adjoining residential property shall comply with one of the following:
 - i. Provide a sill at least 42 inches above the finished floor;
 - ii. Provide obscured glazing to a height of at least 42 inches above the finished floor; or
 - iii. Be offset from any opposing property, window, balcony, or deck between Small Lot Homes that are part of the same project.
- d. Windows and doors shall be recessed or projected at least two inches from the adjoining wall plane, incorporated into a projecting bay, or framed by trim that creates an equivalent change in depth.

Section 2. Windows and Openings

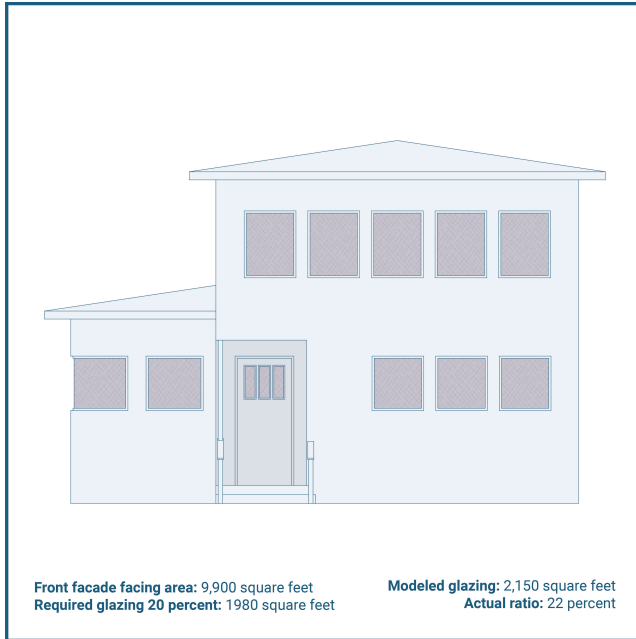


Image 12
Windows and Openings

A Small Lot Home with a glazed area exceeding 20 percent.

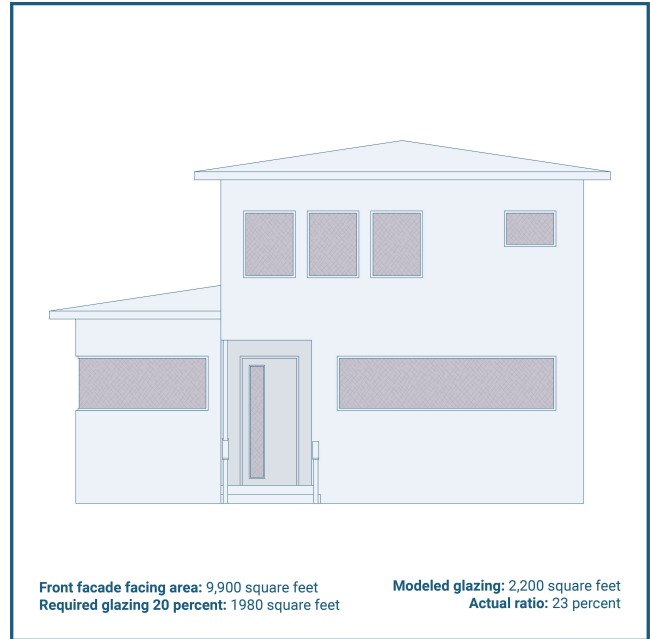


Image 13
Windows and Openings

A Small Lot Home with a combination of windows to achieve a glazed area of 23 percent.

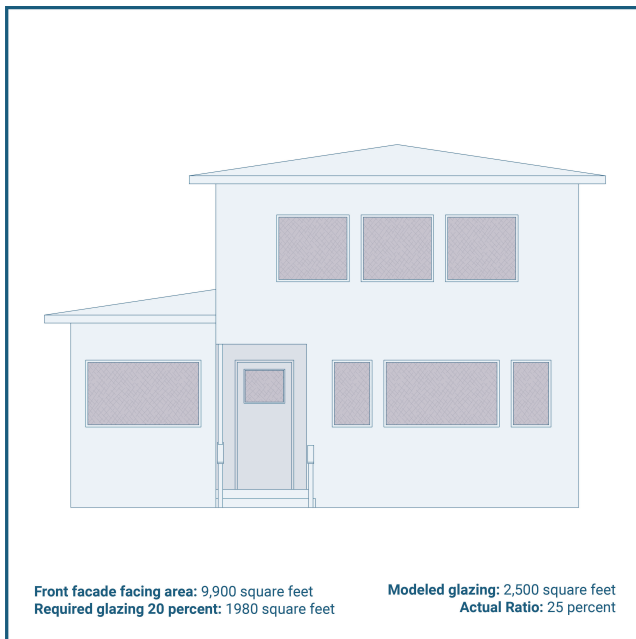


Image 14
Windows and Openings

A Small Lot Home with picture windows to achieve a glazed area of 25 percent.

3. Roof Forms and Roof Decks

a. Roof Forms

- i. A Small Lot Project of two or more stories with a facade facing a public right-of-way shall incorporate at least one of the following:
 1. A roof slope of at least 2:12;
 2. At least one of the following methods to differentiate the roofline:
 - a. Use of two roof forms such as: a gable, hip, shed, or flat roof
 - b. A change in roof pitch such as a change in the slope of the roof
 - c. A change in the direction of the run of the primary, secondary, and tertiary roof ridge
 - d. A change in height of the primary or secondary or tertiary roof such as a variation in the elevation of a roof ridge, eave, or parapet.
 3. A balcony located on the second story or above, or a roof deck that faces a public right-of-way.

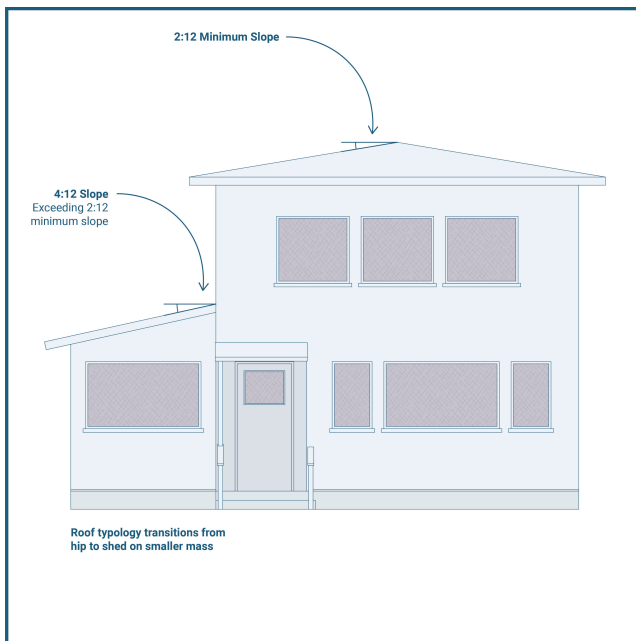


Image 15
Roof Forms

A Small Lot Home depicting a change in roof slope and form.

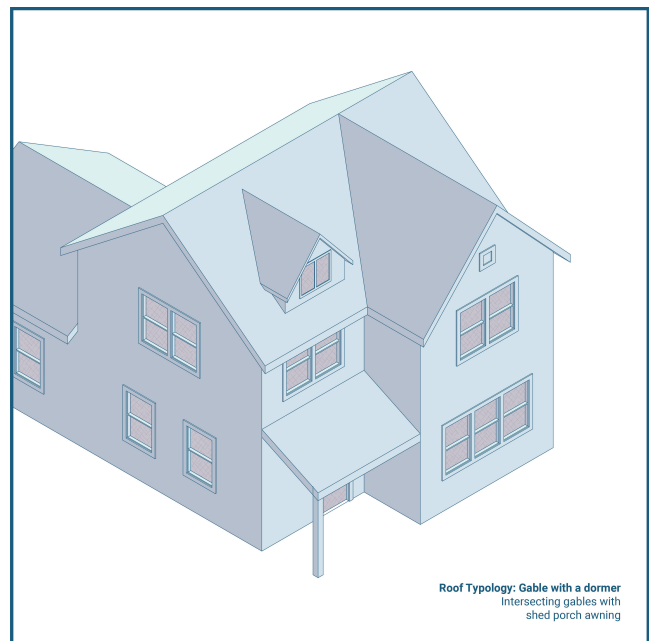


Image 16
Roof Forms: Typology - Gable with Dormer

A gable roof with a dormer on a Small Lot Home.

Section 3 Roof Forms

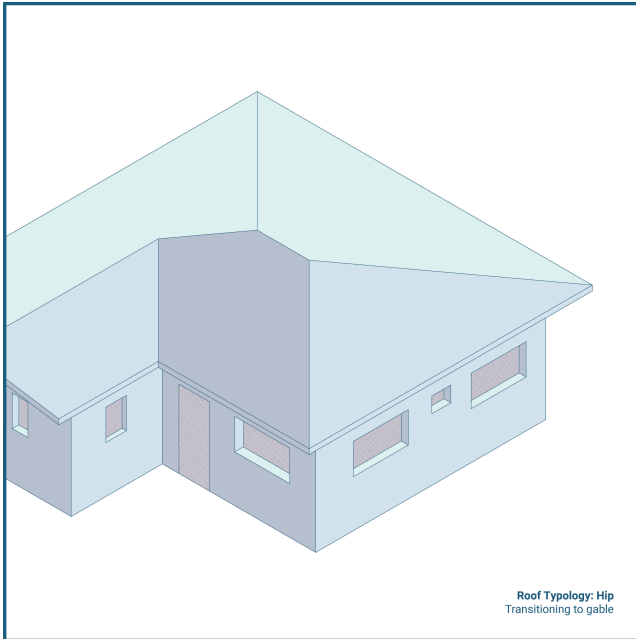


Image 17
Roof Forms: Typology - Hip

A Small Lot Home with a hip roof that transitions to a gable on the far left.

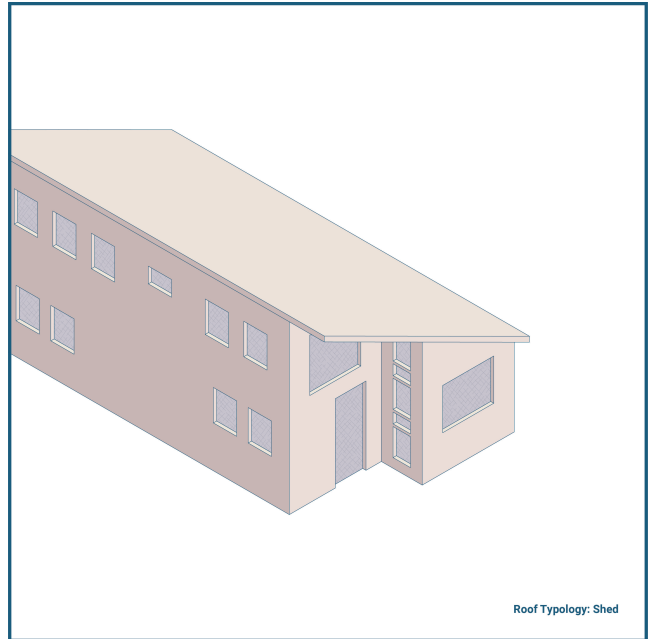


Image 18
Roof Forms: Typology - Shed

A shed roof on a Small Lot Home.

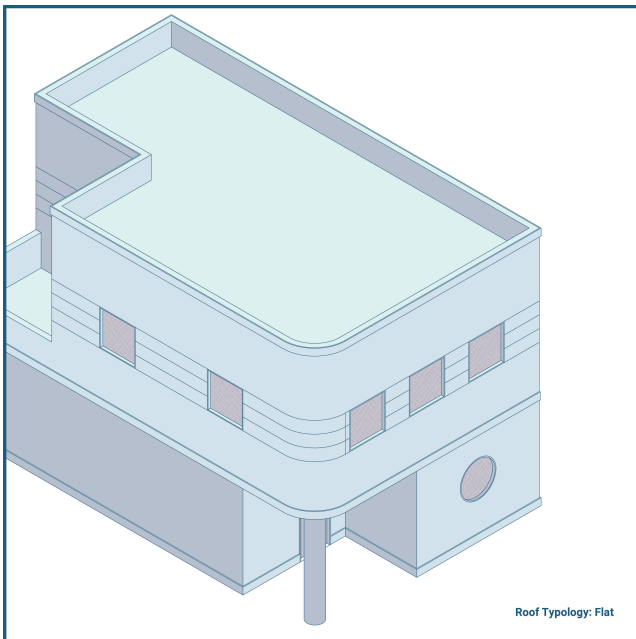


Image 19
Roof Forms: Typology - Flat

A Small Lot Home with a flat roof and a parapet.

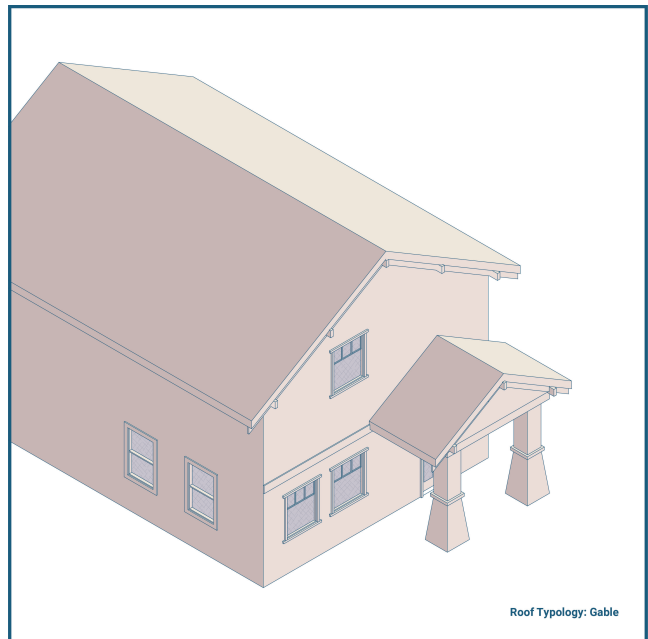


Image 20
Roof Forms: Typology - Gable

A gable roof on a Small Lot Home.

b. Roof Decks

- i. A roof deck located within 10 feet of an adjacent existing residential property line or adjacent existing residential property shall be set back at least five feet from the roof edge along the shared property line.
 1. This setback requirement shall not apply to roof decks abutting a public right-of-way or a nonresidential use.
- ii. Where a roof deck abuts an adjacent residential property line, continuous privacy screening shall be provided along the affected edge.
 1. Screening may consist of a wall, parapet, screen, planter, or any combination thereof. A planter used for screening shall be at least 24 inches deep and contain vegetation capable of reaching a minimum height of 36 inches.

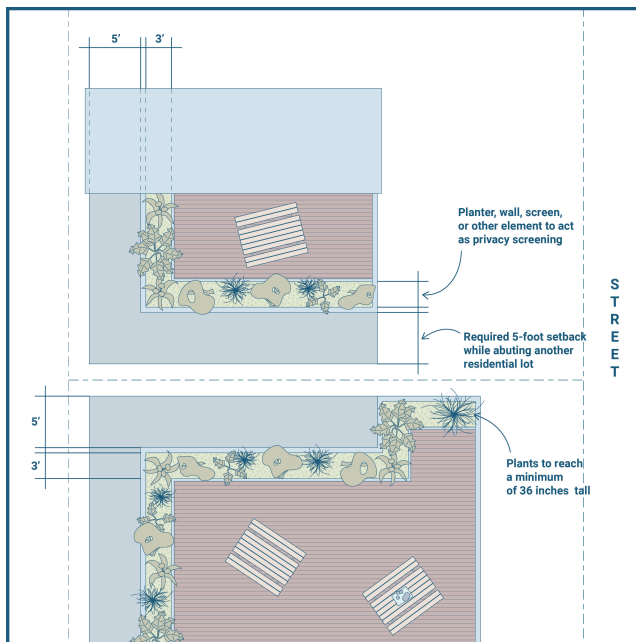


Image 21
Roof Forms

Two abutting Small Lot Homes feature adjacent roof decks with required planter buffers that provide separation and privacy.

4. Mixed-Use Small Lot Subdivisions

- a. Small Lot Projects may include Small Lot Homes with commercial uses located on the ground floor ("Mixed-Use Small Lot Projects"). Mixed-Use Small Lot Projects shall comply with all applicable LAMC requirements governing the site, including requirements related to parking, signage, access, and floor area ratio (FAR). In addition to the other Design Standards contained in this document, Mixed-Use Small Lot Projects shall comply with the following Design Standards.
 - i. Mixed-Use Small Lot Projects shall be located along the frontage of the subdivision abutting the public right-of-way.
 - ii. A Mixed-Use Small Lot Project shall provide a separate ground floor entrance to the commercial use, or a lobby that serves both the residential and commercial uses.
 - iii. The commercial entrance shall be directly accessible from the right-of-way and open during the normal business hours posted by the business.
 - iv. Store entrances shall be recessed, not flush, with the edge of the building facade to articulate the storefront and provide shelter for persons entering and exiting;
 - v. The ground floor commercial use shall be visually separated from upper residential floors, with a facade treatment such as an awning, framing, setback, or overhang of at least 18 inches in depth, so as to distinguish the commercial base of the building;
 - vi. The storefront of a ground floor non-residential use that fronts a right-of-way shall consist of at least 50 percent transparent windows and doors, unless otherwise prohibited by other sections of the LAMC; and
 - vii. Signage for the ground floor commercial use shall be located at or adjacent to the ground level, and be located no higher than 14 feet.

C.

Landscaping

B. Landscaping

1. Landscaping

- a. All portions of the Project Site not occupied by buildings, parking areas, driveways, pedestrian pathways, required accessible routes, utilities, maintenance areas, or trash areas shall be landscaped. At least 40 percent of the area subject to this requirement shall consist of living plant material, including groundcover, shrubs, and trees. The balance may consist of permeable hardscape or other non-living landscape materials, including permeable pavers. Synthetic turf shall not count toward the required living plant material.
- b. One 15-gallon shade tree shall be provided for every two lots, with any fractional result rounded up to the next whole number. Required shade trees may be located on individual lots, adjacent to a common pedestrian pathway or access driveway, or grouped elsewhere on the Project Site. Each required tree shall be provided with a planting area measuring at least four feet by four feet and a minimum soil depth of 18 inches.
 - i. Each existing Significant Tree, as defined in LAMC Section 12.03, that is retained and protected on the Project Site shall count as two shade trees toward fulfillment of the tree-planting requirement.

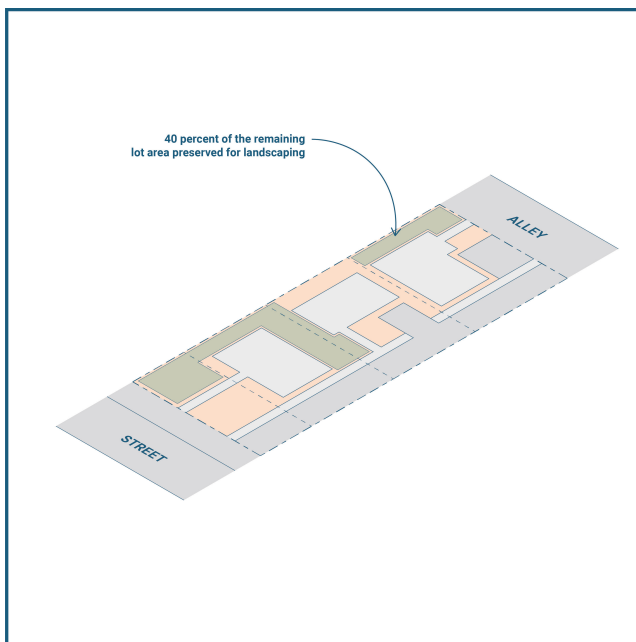


Image 22
Landscaping Coverage

After removing developed and functional areas, all remaining site area shall be landscaped with at least 40 percent consisting of living plant material.

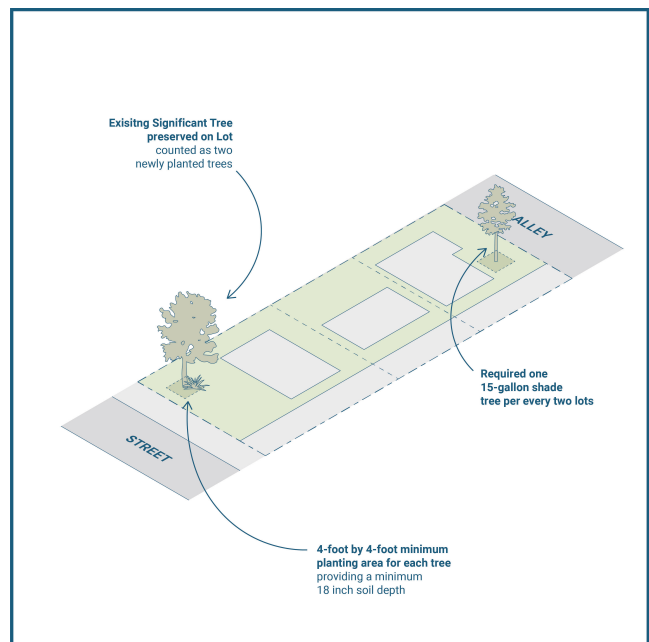


Image 23
Landscaping Shade Trees

For every two lots, rounded up, a Small Lot Project provides one 15-gallon shade tree, with each existing Significant Tree counting as two required shade trees.

2. Fences and Walls

- a. Pursuant to the LAMC and the Small Lot Ordinance Code Amendment, fences and walls located within setback areas adjacent to a public right-of-way shall not exceed 42 inches in height.
- b. Fences and walls located within perimeter yard setback areas that are not adjacent to a public right-of-way, including those adjacent to alleys, shall not exceed eight feet in height.
- c. Site fences and walls shall be constructed of wood, metal, masonry, composite materials, hedges, dense shrubs, trees, or a combination thereof. Chain-link fencing facing a public right-of-way is prohibited unless it is set back at least one foot from the front property line and the setback area is landscaped with plant material provided in a minimum soil depth of 18 inches.
- d. Each lot with frontage abutting a public right-of-way shall include at least one pedestrian access opening within any fence or wall located in the front or street side yard. The opening shall provide a minimum clear width of at least 36 inches.

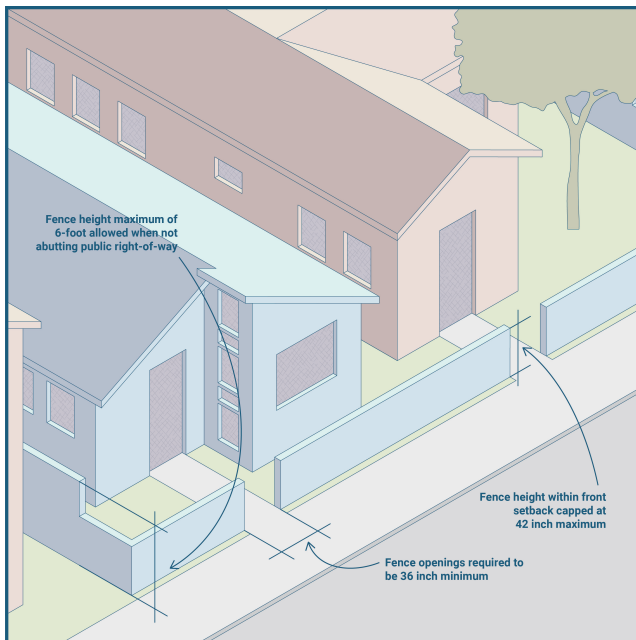


Image 24
Fences and Walls

The fences along the public right-of-way do not exceed 42 inches in height, while fences elsewhere may reach six feet. Small Lot Homes that face the public right-of-way provide separated pedestrian access through fence openings that are at least 36 inches wide.

3. Outdoor Lighting

- a. All outdoor light fixtures shall direct their light downward, without any upward and sideway glare, and away from adjacent structures and property lines.



Image 24
Outdoor Lighting

The lighting on these Small Lot Homes is directed downward and away from adjacent properties.