

LOS ANGELES RIVER DESIGN GUIDELINES

Best Practices for “*Riverly*” Development



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INTRODUCTION

The **Los Angeles River Design Guidelines** (“Guidelines”) handbook highlights best practices for designing development projects to increase awareness of, and access to, the Los Angeles River. The Guidelines supplement the development regulations of the **Los Angeles River Improvement Overlay (“RIO”) District** established by ordinance in the Los Angeles Municipal Code (LAMC Section 13.17). By offering more direction for proceeding with the design of a project located within the RIO District, the Guidelines illustrate options, solutions, and techniques to improve the aesthetic quality of the River and its surrounding communities; increase the availability of publicly accessible open space; and effectively utilize public rights-of-way as locations to capture and treat stormwater. The Guidelines represent performance goals for projects located within the RIO District. The Guidelines are not zoning regulations or development standards, and do not supersede regulations in the Municipal Code.

The Purpose of this document is to:

- Communicate the river design qualities expected of development within the RIO District;
- Facilitate the fair and consistent application of river friendly design objectives;
- Protect investment within the RIO District by encouraging consistently high-quality development;
- Foster a sense of community and encourage pride of ownership;
- Establish a positive interface with the River and the Greenway thereby integrating the River into the daily life of the City;
- Promote pedestrian and other multi-modal connections to the River and thereby extend the City to and across the River; and
- Reduce the amount of untreated runoff entering the River and its tributaries.

APPLICABILITY

The **Los Angeles River Design Guidelines** should be used by the Planning Department staff, as well as developers, architects, engineers, and community members, in evaluating project applications along with relevant policies from the General Plan Framework and Community Plans. To achieve the stated purpose, the Guidelines are recommended for all new Development Projects (as defined by LAMC 16.05.B.1) located within the Los Angeles RIO District seeking either Discretionary Approvals (as defined by LAMC Section 16.05 B.2) or applications for Density Bonus incentives (pursuant to LAMC Sections 12.22 A 25 (g)(2) and 12.22 A 25 (g)(3)).

USE OF GUIDELINES

Property owners, developers, designers, and contractors proposing new development within the RIO District should first review the development regulations required by the **River Improvement Overlay District Ordinance** (LAMC Section 13.17). They should then proceed to the **zoning** of the property being developed and the **Citywide Design Guidelines** relevant to residential, commercial, and/or industrial land uses. And finally, they should turn to the **Los Angeles River Design Guidelines** for further design guidance for river specific design considerations.

The provisions set forth in this document identify the desired level of design quality for all developments within the Los Angeles RIO District. However, flexibility is necessary and encouraged to achieve excellent design. To that end, substantial conformance to these guidelines is recommended.

ORGANIZATION

Each section of the **Los Angeles River Design Guidelines** is organized by overarching objectives (e.g., Consider River Context, Visibility, and Access in Building and Site Design). Each topic includes an objective statement followed by a list of implementation strategies to be considered for incorporation into a proposed project.

DESIGN GUIDELINES

OBJECTIVE 1:

CONSIDER RIVER CONTEXT, VISIBILITY, AND ACCESS IN BUILDING AND SITE DESIGN

SITE PLANNING

1. **Incorporate passageways or paseos** into mid-block developments adjacent to the river, to facilitate pedestrian access to the river greenway, such that pedestrians and bicyclists will not need to walk or ride the perimeter of a block in order to access the river.
2. **Activate the passageway or paseo** so that they are safe and visually interesting spaces, using recycled water features, pedestrian-level lighting, artwork, benches, landscape or special paving.
3. In the setback area, adjacent to the river, establish a **courtyard or “outdoor room”** incorporating outdoor dining, seating or water features, for example.

BUILDING ORIENTATION

4. **Orient the long side of large-format retail** to be parallel to the river corridor to physically define the edge of the public greenway. Large format retail buildings with multiple tenants should provide distinct entrances and storefronts to improve site design flexibility for future retail uses at the same location.
5. **Design and orient warehouse and industrial buildings** such that the shorter width of the building is oriented towards the river.

ENTRANCES

6. Promote pedestrian connectivity from the river by placing **publicly accessible entrances at grade level** or slightly above, and unobstructed from view from the river corridor. Avoid sunken entryways below the level of the adjacent river pathways.
7. In mixed-use residential, retail, and commercial projects as well as public facilities, ensure that ground floor uses, facing the river, maintain a high degree of transparency and **maximize a visual connection to the river** by providing clear and unobstructed windows, free of reflective glass coatings and exterior mounted gates or security grills.
8. Provide **bicycle lockers and/or racks** near river-facing building entrances.

OBJECTIVE 2:

EMPLOY HIGH QUALITY, ATTRACTIVE AND DISTINGUISHABLE ARCHITECTURE ADJACENT TO THE RIVER

BUILDING FAÇADE AND MATERIALS

1. Design the building façade facing the river with the same **quality of design, materials, and detail** as street-facing facades. *Please refer to Objective 2 of the respective Citywide Commercial, Industrial, or Residential Design Guidelines for a full description of the guidelines identified under each of the categories listed above.*

OBJECTIVE 3:

MAXIMIZE ACCESS TO, AND AWARENESS OF, THE RIVER AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE COMMUNITY

RIVER PATHS

1. On projects where a river pathway does not exist, work with the Los Angeles County Flood Control District and the City's River Project Office to **establish a publicly accessible greenway**, where feasible, within the public-right-of-way along the length of the property adjacent to the river. The path design may include trees, lighting, and site amenities such as trash receptacles, benches, drinking fountains and bike racks. *Lighting, trees, and other site amenities should be selected from the Los Angeles County's River Master Plan Landscape Guidelines and Plant Palettes.*

VIEWS

2. Create **view opportunities** to and from the river.
3. Preserve **visual access to existing landmarks and overlooks** within view corridors.

POCKET PARKS

4. Where feasible, **provide and improve a public easement** adjacent to the river path as a pocket park, community garden or other public space.

OBJECTIVE 4:

MINIMIZE THE QUANTITY AND APPEARANCE OF PARKING AND LOADING AREAS

ON-SITE RIVER ADJACENT PARKING

1. Place **on-site parking so that it does not dominate** the river corridor.

RIVER ADJACENT LOADING

2. Locate **loading facilities so that docks and doors do not dominate** the river frontage and are screened from the river.
3. Situate **loading areas so as not to interfere** with on-site pedestrian and bicycle circulation to and from the river corridor. When feasible, separate loading areas from areas that are used for public entrances.

SHARED PARKING

4. **Encourage shared parking** agreements to minimize the amount of area dedicated to parking.

OBJECTIVE 5:

UTILIZE PUBLIC RIGHT-OF-WAYS TO CAPTURE AND TREAT STORMWATER

GREEN STREETS

1. Design cul-de-sacs, street ends, vacated streets, and remnant street width to **provide pocket parks** which can serve as gateways to the river while also assisting in the treatment and infiltration of stormwater as well as dry-weather run-off.
2. Design parkways and traffic circles to assist in the **treatment and infiltration of stormwater** as well as dry-weather runoff. *See the City's Green Street Standard Plans for reference.*