Latino Design Guidelines: Placemaking for the Emerging Latino Community

Design Alternatives for Latino Communities
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Latinos are changing every aspect of the country: food, culture, music, sports, television, employment, politics, and our cities. The Latino population in the United States has been a growing demographic group in the last decades; it is predicted that it will be the largest minority in the United States in the very near future. As this minority group continues to grow, it will intrinsically change the face of our neighborhoods, schools and environments.

It is important for developers, government agencies, and planners to understand the implications of Latino growth, their social needs, and settlement pattern to plan accordingly for the future. It is imperative to determine the needs of this increasingly important cultural group to be able to adequately plan for their growth, particularly in reference to the built environment.

These design guidelines aim at creating a framework for developers and contractors that can be used to create a development for Latino communities. This document highlights Latinos preferences within their homes, streets and outdoor spaces.

The Latino Design Guidelines should be used as the first step towards the creation of places that will adequately meet the needs of this particular demographic group. It is important to mention that these design guidelines should not be the only tool in creating Latino communities. Extensive community participation, a full understanding of the location and demographic of the specific communities is extremely important in creating developments that meet the needs of the specific group being targeted. Examining the community being planned is extremely important. The community’s issues and opportunities should be examined and taken into consideration when making future plans.
I.1 Intent of Guidelines

Creating a sense of identity is extremely important for the success of Latino communities. The design guidelines aim at guiding developers, designers, and planners to create environments that help establish and reinforce the identity of the community. The following goals and objectives will help guide the design and construction of projects that respect the preferences of Latinos within the built environment.

Goal 1: To create spaces where the community can establish its identity:

Objective A: By creating plazas and markets where community events can be celebrated. Surrounding these outdoor public spaces with commercial and retail uses will aid in the creation of comfortable and active spaces.

Objective B: By encouraging the thoughtful placement of parks and green spaces that allow neighbors to enjoy the outdoors, interact as a community and gain renewed pride in their neighborhood.

Objective C: By creating partnerships with community organizations and agencies that serve as support systems for the entire community and play a significant role in its identity. It is important to make these organizations the focal point of the design.

Objective D: By creating guidelines that allow the community members to express their identity within the development through their homes and civic art.

Goal 2: To create vibrant, safe, and walkable neighborhoods:

Objective A: By designing comfortable pedestrian friendly street and block networks. Small blocks and street grid designs are the most conducive for walkability and have historically been used within Latino settlements.

Objective B: By developing a streetscape design that encourages the use of landscaping and open spaces where walking is enjoyable and pedestrians find protection from vehicles. Taking into consideration the needs of the growing family structure and how that affects pedestrian needs is important.

Objective C: By using balconies, arcades and porticos a transition can be created from outdoor and indoor spaces. This allows “keeping eyes on the street” making spaces safer. Safety can also be accomplished by encouraging smaller setbacks for buildings and creating adequate street lighting.

Goal 3: To create uses that encourage a diversity of backgrounds while still celebrating Latino heritage:

Objective A: By developing housing alternatives that cater to people in all stages of life and economic levels. Encouraging low income housing as well as including multifamily, single family, rental and owner oriented household typologies would be necessary.

Objective B: By encouraging smaller and a broader diversity of retailers through the specification of smaller lease spaces and creating flexible leasing alternatives.

Objective C: By creating transportation alternatives and parking requirements that encourage the use of multiple transportation modes. By doing this it allows all members of the neighborhood the freedom of access around the neighborhood. By designing housing and commercial uses that meet the demographic needs of the community, like larger family size, etc.
I.2 Using the Guidelines

Who will Use the Guidelines

The Latino Design Guidelines will help community developers, city planners, and growing Latino neighborhoods create places where their design preferences can be met. Following traditional neighborhood design would be highly encouraged when designing for Latinos. Latino design guidelines share many of the standards of traditional neighborhood design. These design guidelines are one of several tools that must be used to create Latino communities. The specific needs of the community should be carefully considered. The following are important guidelines that planning agencies and communities must also meet to help create stable Latino neighborhoods:

• Help established Latino owned and oriented business
• Attract Latino service outreach and advocacy agencies
• Encourage the formation of adequate schooling systems and opportunities for higher school enrollment and attendance
• Allow for a mix of new and older more established Latino citizens
• Latino immigrants from different geographic backgrounds

How to Use the Guidelines

Developers, planners, and designers should use the guidelines in conjunction with the community to develop Latino oriented developments that encourage the design of open spaces, walkable neighborhoods and different housing alternatives. The guidelines are divided into four chapters highlighted in the bottom of each page:

Site Planning, Land Use, Building Configuration, and Streetscape

Each chapter is subdivided into sections containing further detailed information. These are labeled as subsection in the top left corner of each page, ie. Section 2 of Chapter 3 will be labeled 3.2. Additionally, terms that are defined in the glossary will be underlined in the design guidelines.
CHAPTER 1: SITE PLANNING

Latino preference for specific design elements is reminiscent of what is familiar to them from their countries of origin. This recreation of elements help Latinos find a sense of place within their neighborhoods in the United States. Within history the Law of the Indies were the initial design guidelines for Spanish colonial settlements (Figure 1&2). This document helped create many of the spaces that are dear to Latinos today. This site planning section takes into consideration this historic document as well as traditional neighborhood design elements that help create civic centers and a mix of commercial and housing options.

An interconnected street network and block configuration creates the beginning of a walkable community reminiscent of their home towns and cities. Small blocks within a grid system tend to allow for a larger diversity of buildings types and uses. A grid network allows for improved linkages between urban and residential spaces within the neighborhood. A clear center within the neighborhood is also essential to its form.

Introduction | Site Planning | Land Use | Streetscape | Building Configuration
1.1 Site Configuration

The *Law of the Indies* first established the grid system as the ideal site configuration alternative. Most historic Spanish settlements were created with this form. Today the grid is still considered the ideal alternative to create interconnected Latino communities.

- The suggested site configuration is the street grid
- A main plaza should sit at the community center within the grid surrounded by rectangular blocks (*Figure 4*)
- Latino settlement centers should be designed as a densely packed mixture of neighborhoods and businesses.
- A density gradient is encouraged within Latino settlements. Ideally the community will have larger densities close to the center and lower densities closer to the outskirts.
- When a grid cannot be used due to different terrain, blocks should be established to follow the grade of the slopes. Connectivity should still be maintained within the street system (*Figure 3*).
1.2 Street Pattern

- In all parts of the neighborhood it is strongly suggested that the street network is interconnected (Figure 5).

- A street hierarchy should be created to encourage major traffic through specific thoroughfares while limiting it in others (See Section 4.1).

- The different types of streets should be designed to improve pedestrian safety and create a more walkable community, while still accommodating vehicular traffic (See Chapter 3).

- Dead end streets and cul-de-sacs should not be encouraged. The only reason a dead end street or cul-de-sac should be used is if an area is facing a natural or man made edge: a river, canal, lake, railroad tracks, etc. (Figure 6).
1.3 Block Size

- Within Latino communities walkability is a very important element. Blocks that do not exceed 600 feet in length are more suitable for this purpose.

- It is recommended that small lots be reconfigured to accommodate higher density uses like multifamily homes and mixed use buildings (Figures 8a and 8b).

- Lot reconfiguration can also aid in accommodating the parking needs of these new uses. By increasing density with a small building footprint it allows for more outdoor spaces that can be made into parks or parking lots.

- In blocks that have buildings with 200 or more feet of frontage on the street, a public right-of-way with a minimum of 20 feet in width and crossing the entire depth of the property should be introduced. This should aid in connecting the street network even further (Figure 7).
1.4 Lot Configuration and Setbacks

Commercial and Mixed Use

- The front facade of buildings should have a zero lot line. A few feet, 3-5, might be used for landscaping and creating breaks in the facade (Figure 9).
- It is recommended that these uses sit as close as possible to the sidewalk framing the street.
- Parking garages and interior courtyards should be framed by buildings

Housing

- Lot sizes within Latino communities are within the traditional neighborhood standards with a range from 40-60 ft in width to 100-150 ft in depth for single family homes. Wider lots can be used for multifamily homes.
- The homes should be setback 15-20 feet from the street curb
- Back yards should be maintained larger for family gatherings and accessory buildings.
- Within the blocks, all residential plans should introduce midblock alleyways that allow for rear entry garages. This will prevent the garage entries from disturbing the pedestrian activity in the main residential streets (Figure 10).
1.5 Parking

- Locate buildings facing the main street with a zero lot line and the parking behind it (*Figure 11a*).

- Parking lots facing main throughfares are highly discouraged (*Figure 11b*).

- Create landscape buffers around parking lots to decrease their visibility from the street.

- Minimize the number of driveway curb cuts.

- Parking standards should be examined so that they do not require an extremely large number of parking spaces and consider the mixes of uses.

- Underground parking is highly encouraged and uses to decrease the cost of construction and help minimize the number of curb cuts and entrances.

- If at grade parking is the only alternative it should be wrapped with at least 15 feet of active use (*Figure 12*).

- Parking and loading should share access lanes to reduce curb cuts and access doorways.

- When a building contains more than one frontage parking entrances, loading docks and other secondary entrances should be located on the secondary facade instead of the primary street.
Several changes within the traditional land use models within our cities should be considered to accommodate the needs of Latino communities. The following suggestions should be considered a few alternatives to improving the built environment. Increase the city and zoning limits to allow for more units to be built within lots and increase densities should be considered. This should be done especially on developments along transit services since Latinos are highly dependent on this type of transportation.

In the denser areas zoning should be changed to accommodate a mix of uses within blocks and buildings. There should be a significant increase in requirements for open spaces in these areas as well.

Changing zoning to permit commercial uses within neighborhoods like small corner stores and vending, and increasing the percentage of open space should be considered within the residential areas.

A second land use challenge within Latino communities is the creation of affordable housing alternatives. Several tools can be used to encourage the construction and retention of low income housing: inclusionary requirements, impact fees, Tax Increment Financing, or an Infrastructure Financing District. New developments should require a significant percentage of units with two or more bedrooms which is more family friendly and affordable than single family homes. An alternative for affordability is also separating the cost of parking from the units, and making it an additional amenity for those who want to purchase or rent for their own units. This should be matched with parking requirement reduction. Encouraging the construction of units that are affordable by design can also allow for affordable housing alternatives.

As mentioned in the parking section, parking requirements should be reduced by taking into consideration the mix of uses. This requirement should also take into consideration the availability of alternate modes of transportation since Latinos depend on other forms of transportation than the vehicle.
2.1 Open Spaces

a. Plaza

- The plaza should be tied to the street network connecting it to all parts of the settlement.
- It should be no less than 200 ft wide by 300 ft long and no larger than 800 ft long by 530 ft wide. A good proportion is 600 ft long by 400 ft wide. The ratio for these is 2:3 forming a rectangle (Figure 13).
- Plazas are more commonly paved than lawned, with planting materials used mostly in planter strips framing the open space of the plaza.
- Many of the plazas have historic benches and lighting, kiosks and statues in the center and fountains at its ends (Figure 14).
- More informal design elements like domino stands, shoe polishing stations, and moveable carts with vendors are encouraged to help enhance the plaza environment.
- Public plazas should allow for flexible use of the space.

b. Parks

- A minimum amount of open space should be established for Latino communities usually between 10-15 acres per 1000 people.
- Parks should be placed at locations where they are easily accessible to pedestrians within the street network.
- Community Parks: These parks should be both active and passive. They are usually 30-50 acres in size (Figure 15 & 16).
- Pocket Parks: These smaller parks, 5 to 10 acres, can be more private and surrounded by residential uses. Pocket parks will serve as one of the communities’ defining elements as a place where neighbors can relate (Figure 17).
2.2 Commercial

Government agencies can encourage the formation and retention of small businesses through zoning, subsidized leases, etc.

- Well articulated pedestrian entries and porticos are encouraged for building frontages.
- Windows should be transparent for maximum visibility from the sidewalks into the building interior.
- Ground level display areas should be maximized. *(Figure 18)*
- Fast food establishments if incorporated into the neighborhood should follow specific standards:
  a. Small signs complementing the character of the neighborhood
  b. Omit at all possible drivethrough windows
  c. Locate parking in the rear
- Buildings should be placed to meet the front property line and the pedestrian environment
- Locate loading and delivery facilities at the rear of commercial uses and screened from the pedestrian environments
- Interior clear ceiling heights should be maximized to increase the long-term viability of spaces
- Outdoor seating spaces are highly encouraged when space is available on the street.
- Market Spaces are unique to Latino developments. They are informal, within one large warehouse with smaller stalls for each vendor. These buildings usually have an open floor layout where booths are inserted, similar to a European arcade market. Outdoor mercados are also used, with outdoor street vendors, usually set up similarly to a flea market *(Figure 19)*.
- Stalls within mercados are usually a maximum of 10x 15 feet.

*Figure 18: [http://vivirlatino.com/](http://vivirlatino.com/)*

*Figure 19: Plaza Fiesta, Atlanta GA*
2.3 Housing

- It is recommended that all of the homes’ front entrance face the main street, and the garages are placed facing alleys in the middle of the block.
- See Section 1.4 for housing site configuration.
- Any housing type close the city center or plaza should be designed to have a zero lot line to guarantee a dense street environment.

- Mutlifamily Housing should include:
  a. A landscaped focal point or interior courtyard which can serve as an amenity for the residents
  b. Communal dining facilities
  c. On-site day care facilities and children’s play area
  d. 2-4 bedrooms units

- Live/work and accessory unit should be built as alternative affordable housing typologies

- Single Family Homes should contain:
  a. 3 to 4 bedrooms
  b. 2 story models with 1st floor public interaction space and 2nd private
  c. Larger dining room and kitchen areas
  d. Flex Space
  e. Garages can be utilized as living space by placing overhead doors at front and rear so the garage can be used as a gathering room that connects to backyard creating a “corridor”

Figure 20: http://mlsimage.fnisrediv.com/ListingImages/casocal/images/S515484.jpg

Figure 21
2.4 Community Agencies and Facilities

- Services and amenities available to residents are very important for the success of a community and should be highly encouraged. These could be transit, parks, child care, library services, etc.

- Create partnerships with community agencies to provide services that might not be provided by the city or county government; examples of these might be churches, community organizing agencies, and adult teaching groups.

- The agencies should be located at a focal point within the community, like churches, community centers, etc.

- They should be accessible to all community members.

- Agencies and Facilities should be located in close proximity to other commercial activity and outdoor spaces.

Figure 22: http://images.travelpod.com

Figure 23: www.southboston.com
The public spaces within communities are the most important for pedestrians. All of the streetscape elements can help create a cohesive safe environment while enhancing the character of the neighborhood. While plazas allow for more formal gatherings, the street serves as spaces where Latinos can meet their neighborhoods on a daily basis and reinforce their sense of identity.

It is imperative that these spaces are created with the safety and wellbeing of the pedestrian in mind. Latinos as a cultural group are more likely to walk to work, stores and for recreation, therefore these spaces should be carefully designed to be enjoyable.

This chapter also includes sections that illustrate how Latinos express their identity within the community. Through the use of public art and murals Latinos are able to express the history and culture of their neighborhood and its members.
3.1 Street Width

**a. Commercial Streets**
- The minimum width of each lane should be 15 feet and the maximum width at 18 feet.
- Commercial streets should not exceed more than 4 lanes in total.
- Medians should be used to make pedestrian crossing safer and to reduce vehicular speed. These should range from 5 to 15 feet in width (*Figure 24*).
- These arterials will be surrounded by mixed use buildings and high density residential.
- Parallel parking should be allowed in commercial streets.

**b. Residential Streets**
- Should not exceed 4 traffic lanes.
- Each lane should not exceed 15 feet in width (*Figure 25*).
- Residential streets should be designed to reduce vehicular speeds.
- Pedestrian crossings should be decorated with paved bricks so they are more visible to the driver. Traffic calming devices may be used on some street to discourage speeding.

**c. Alleys**
- Alley should not exceed 11 feet in width (*Figure 26*).
- They should be treated as “living streets” where traffic is calm.
- Landscaping and paving should be designed to create safe walkable environments.
- Utilities should be placed underground, including internet services. Mechanical and electrical equipment and trash areas should be enclosed from public view, even in alleys.
- Heights of buildings along the alley should not exceed 1.5 times the width of the alley. This will allow enough light into the alley.
3.2 Sidewalks

a. Commercial
- Should range from 7-12 feet wide.
- Should accommodate a landscaped strip 3-5 feet, 5-7 feet are recommended for outdoor seating and furnishing. With outdoor seating the width should no exceed 12 feet (Figure 27).
- Small pocket parks are encouraged to serve as dog areas or outdoor eating areas for employees and residents. They are usually within the neighborhoods in close proximity to apartment complexes and mixed use buildings.

b. Residential
- Sidewalks are smaller, between 5-10 feet, since there is less pedestrian activity (Figure 28).
- Landscaped strips are encouraged usually 3-5 feet wide.
3.3 Landscape

- In larger residential buildings adequate space for a landscape buffer is desired to provide privacy to the ground floor residential units. A setback of 5’ should allow for this.

- Street trees should:
  a. enhance the pedestrian character and should convey the neighborhood’s identity
  b. be long lasting, drought, smog, and fire resistance
  c. Be picked so they do not damage existing infrastructure
  d. be used to emphasize the existing hierarchy of streets

- Ornamental landscaping should be used to emphasize entrances to commercial uses and lobbies in residential buildings. It can also be used to emphasize entrances into public spaces, trails, and parks.

- Trees planted in a 3-8 foot planter running along side the roadway provides greenery and shade along the sidewalk and a more comfortable space (Figure 29).

- To create color in the front yard of single family homes, Latinos prefer the use of shrubs, paving, and outdoor furnishing, instead of using flowering plants (Figure 30).
3.4 Public Art and Communication

- Creating murals and public pieces of art will allow the neighborhoods to convey their unique character.
- Uses where facade articulations are not necessary like parking lots, are great opportunities for public art.
- Visible and publicly accessible walls should be provided for the creation of murals within the community.

- Signage should be designed so that it:
  
a. Identifies distinctive areas and attractions within the neighborhood  
b. Adds to the unique identity of the community

- Additionally signs should be both in the English and Spanish language so that they are clearly understood by all of the citizens within the community.
3.5 Alternate Transportation Systems

- Access to public transportation is extremely important to access jobs, commercial activity, as well as recreation. Bicycle use, carpooling, and use of public transit should be encourage by making these more readily available.

- Providing alternative modes of transportation should be an important aspect of the community since Latinos are less likely to use the vehicle. Several alteratives exist:
  
a. If a city wide bicycle network exist, the new development shold create a network that ties into the already existing plans. These facilities should be convenient and accessible.

b. Employment centers should be consulted to create systems to encouraging employees to use alternate forms of transportation.

c. The community should also look at the alternative of carsharing which allows individuals the use of a vehicle without the cost of ownership. This can be done through private companies that allows members to pay a flat hourly rate or monthly fee to use the vehicles.
The goal for this chapter is to create buildings that respond and engage to the public realm, are detailed and articulated to create visual aesthetics for the pedestrian. The buildings should open up into the exterior spaces and the streetscape. It is also important to create a public/private interface with entries, patios, balconies and stoops from buildings into the public realm.

Although specific styles have been identified to fit within then Latino culture, current examples have shown that this particular group does not adhere strictly to these styles. An organic growth has occurred within the buildings in Latino communities accepting most traditional styles.

Most importantly Latinos use buildings, especially their homes, to express their identity. The following sections aim at reinforcing this type of expression and to allow it to occur within the community.
4.1 Building Scale

Height

- Buildings need to frame streets usually using a 2:1 proportion.
- Taller heights, 3-5 floors, should be used to emphasize key corridors and activity centers and should contain a mix of uses. These should primarily be commercial and multifamily uses.
- They should also frame streets that have a higher hierarchy.
- Single family homes should not exceed 3 stories, not including the basement.
- Taller buildings and towers maybe used to emphasize corners and vistas (Figure 35).

Massing

- Avoid undifferentiated massing longer than 25 feet on residential streets and longer than 40 feet on all other streets. Variation in colors should not be considered enough articulation (Figure 36).
- Difference in materials, setbacks and architectural fenestration should be used to enhance longer facades.
- Long facades should be articulated so that it is not just one large facade but reads as a series of adjacent elements.
- First floors should be highly articulated since it is the floor that the pedestrian is able to enjoy.
4.2 Architectural Style and Detail

- The tendency within existing Latino communities is based on traditional architecture styles and proportions. The use of the traditional proportions base, body and cap should be used to give buildings human scale (Figure 37).

- Commonly used styles are spanish colonial, mission style, pueblo, mediterranean, etc.

- It is very common for Latino communities to have a mix of cultures, architectural styles, and character. It is almost a chaotic existence that allows for the community to express itself and gain its particular identity.

- New buildings should create modern buildings and not just replicate the older architectural styles.

- Architectural features like towers, copulas and bays are encouraged to create this emphasis.

- Piecemeal building is an accepted building style, since it allows the construction of affordable housing (Figure 38)
4.3 Materials

- Stucco, brick and stone are the most commonly used wall materials.
- Brick paving is usually used in sidewalks, crosswalks, and pavements.
- Materials that are durable and long lasting are highly encouraged.

Figure 39: http://www.amservicesco.com/uploads/AMS/mission.jpg

Figure 40: http://farm4.static.
4.4 Color Palette

- Bright pastels are a significant palette used by many Latinos to paint their homes and business.

- Some communities might agree to a specific color palette while others will not.

- The color of one’s home is seen as representative of Latino identity therefore it is not recommended to limit it.

Figure 41: [http://www.flickr.com/]

Figure 42: [http://www.flickr.com/]
4.5 Balconies Arcades and Porches

- Colonnades and balconies serve as activators on the street levels and should be encouraged in mixed use buildings.

- The colonnades may serve as spaces for outdoor activities, like restaurant seating or small markets.

- Most of the homes should have front or side porches facing the main street. Although the layout and detailing of these porches may vary according to style, this element is an essential part of the character of Latino communities.

Figure 43: [Link]

Figure 44: Casa y Comunidad