The mass of a building, its three-dimensional form, is evaluated for scale, bulkiness and relationship to exterior spaces. Massing that is "broken up" to reduce bulkiness is usually more successful. The massing of houses with larger footprints can appear oppressive or overly bulky if care is not taken to articulate the mass. This chapter contains guidelines to mitigate a building's mass and assist in design compatibility with strategies to ensure that new homes and building additions do not overwhelm their sites or their neighborhoods.

"We must demand of our architect that he be a real creative artist—that he understand form and proportion, that he be a man of taste and originality, that he appreciate not merely the general types, but the inner spirit of the architecture of other peoples and other ideals of culture."

The Simple Home

A. Neighborhood Context

Building massing should generally conform to the buildings in the surrounding vicinity.

1. Neighborhood Edges

The edges of neighborhoods or transitional areas between neighborhoods are more conducive to new construction that proposes a change in the generally established massing of buildings in the neighborhood.

2. One-Story Neighborhoods

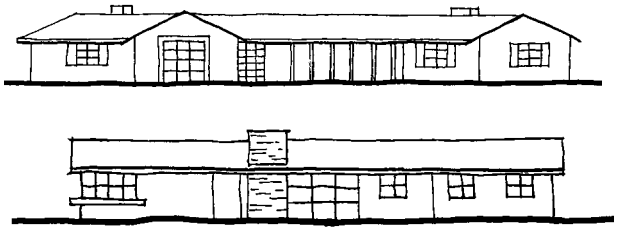
Second story additions and new homes higher than one story in neighborhoods that are predominantly comprised of one-story homes shall receive greater scrutiny during Design Review. These projects require a heightened sensitivity to their neighborhood context. Design strategies that should be considered include:

- Modulating building mass to minimize boxiness
- Partial second story addition
- Setbacks for second story volumes

3. *Ranch Style Homes*

The Ranch Style developed in the years following World War II, is found throughout Hillsborough and is predominant in some neighborhoods. One Ranch Style characteristic is that it is single story, yet many contemporary owners now desire a second floor. However, the massing inherent in the Ranch Style creates unique conditions that require caution to be exercised when altering homes of that style, particularly alterations to the building form. The condition is specifically acute where designers intend to develop a second floor. Homeowners, architects and designers intending to alter the mass and form of a Ranch Style home, particularly in a non-transitional area of a predominantly one-story neighborhood, should be able to clearly communicate during Design Review:

- An understanding of the principles that define the Ranch Style
- An understanding of the neighborhood context in which the home is situated
- A clear concept for how the proposed changes relate to the Ranch Style and augment the architectural character of their neighborhood



"The ground-hugging silhouette of the Western ranch house has long been considered one of its identifying marks."

Western Ranch Houses by Clifford May

a. Horizontal Form

A characteristic of Ranch Style homes is the long linear form of the building mass with low roof pitch. The primary roof ridge usually runs parallel to the front so that the front elevation of the house is composed of the linear plane of the low sloping roof over the low horizontal front façade. The emphasis is on horizontality.

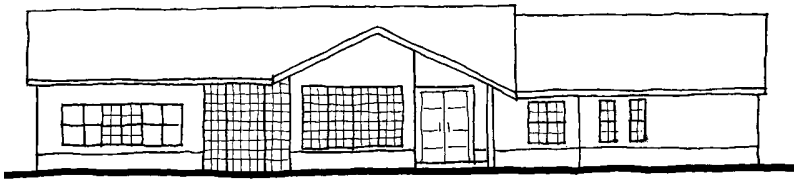
Second story additions to Ranch Style homes should maintain the predominant horizontal character of the style.

b. Exterior Materials

Second story additions to Ranch Style homes should utilize exterior building materials that are the same as those on the existing building or of a color and textural quality that is similar to or blends with those materials.

c. A Change in Style

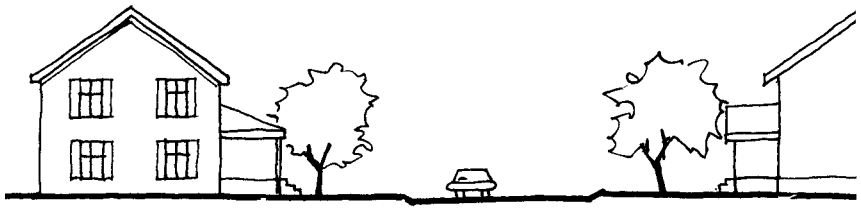
One approach to adding a second floor to a Ranch Style house would be to change the style of the house as part of the addition. A change in the architectural style of the building, however, should be undertaken in a thorough way. Appropriately strategic changes to the floor plan can affect the building massing and corresponding roof form. This in turn will allow for the development of a second story addition that is more appropriate to a different architectural style.



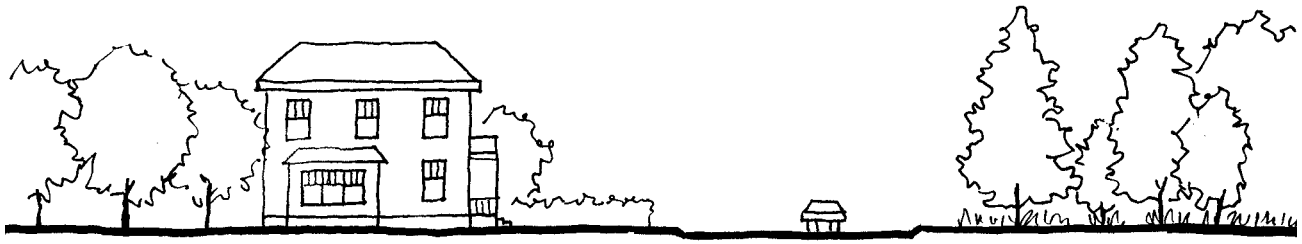
A change in the floor plan allowed for the building to develop different massing and a new style.

4. Sight Adjacencies

The building mass on sites in close proximity to other buildings or narrow streets should be appropriately scaled. Sites adjacent to open space features, such as the Burlingame County Club or Town Open Space areas, are more appropriate for larger building mass.



Buildings in close proximity



Building fronting onto a large open area

B. Scale of Surrounding Landscape

Building massing should respond to the topographical conditions and landscape features that are specific to the site and avoid the loss of significant trees.

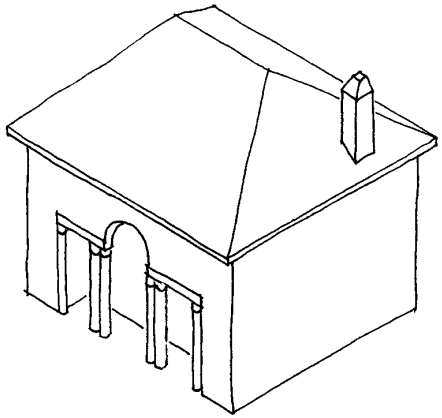
Building sited in conjuntion with landscaping

Building with no evident relationship to landscaping

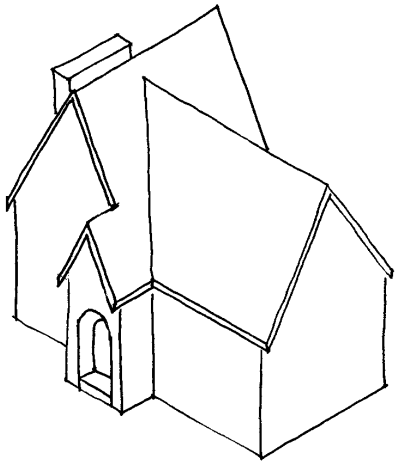
C. Building Elements

An architect or designer can mitigate the effects of massive building forms by modulating the building elements. Some examples are shown here and on the following pages.

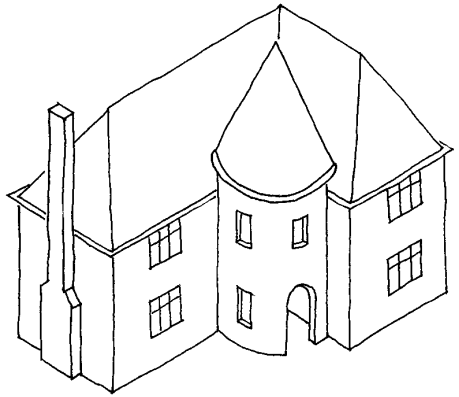
In consultation with architectural style resources, massing should be inherent of an architectural style. For example, peculiar volumes, such as cylinders and conical roofs, should not be employed for architectural styles that do not have a history of incorporating such volumes.



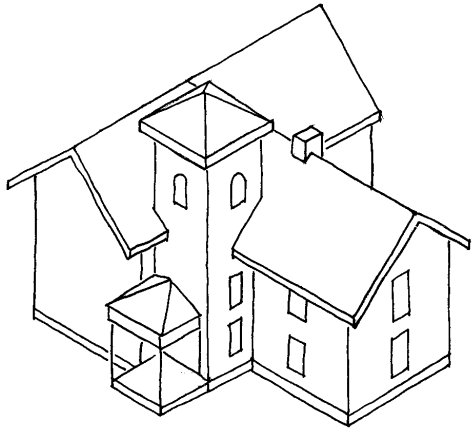
Simple box with space carved out for entry feature



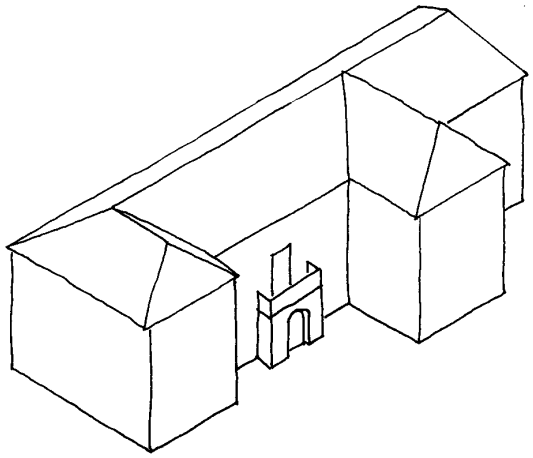
Intersecting rectangular volumes with similar roof pitch



"L" shaped building with cylinder and conical roof



"T" shaped building with tower element and entry feature



Front façade wall plane modulated by building elements

D. Relationship of Building Elements

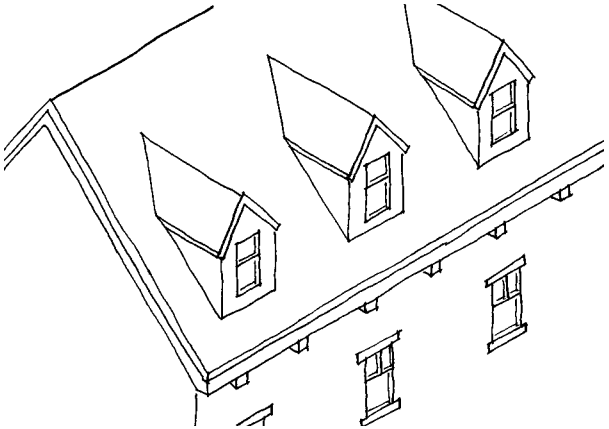
The architectural style will determine the characteristics of a building and the relationships between the various building elements.

1. Masses in Scale With Each Other

The various floor plan components of a building should create a family of massing volumes consistent with the rules of the architectural style for the building.

2. Changes in Plane

A change in the wall plane of a façade should be in keeping with the architectural style of the building and should be significant enough to affect the building mass.

3. Repetitive Elements

Repeating elements, such as dormers, can be more effective when they are equally sized and the spaces between them are of an equal proportion. Where effective, there is also often a relationship to other elements on the facade or roof.