



# Welcome to Multnomah County Land Use and Transportation Planning.

Our planning staff is here to assist you in understanding rules for developing in the National Scenic Area and to help you tailor your project to meet them. As part of that effort, we have developed a series of handouts to explain the development standards and processes that you will need to follow. This handout provides advice for how a property owners or developers might design a project to meet scenic rules in the National Scenic Area.

*Adding to an existing building is somewhat more straightforward and there are different regulations that apply to that situation. Land use planning staff would be happy to explain the differences.*

## What Should I Think About Up Front?

Two main things: how the location of the new building or structure on your site can be made to blend in with its surrounding landscape and not dominate it, and how the design of the new building or structure can be compatible with other development nearby. While there are rules that you will need to meet that relate to other scenic standards, how you respond to these two issues will likely determine whether or not your project can be approved.

## Location of Your Site

Deciding where to place a building or structure depends both on where you (as applicant, property owner, or developer) want it to be and where regulations say it can be built. The first four critical considerations to ask yourself before you settle on a personal preferred location are:

1. Are there any cultural or natural resources or resource buffers on the property?
2. What location will require the least change in topography (that is, the least amount of earth that would need to be moved to change the slope of the land)?
3. Is the property or structure topographically visible from one or more Key Viewing Areas (KVAs)?
4. And if so, where on the site would the building be least visible from these KVAs considering terrain and existing vegetation on the property?

## Cultural and Natural Resources and their Buffers

Question 1 deals with ensuring cultural and natural resources are adequately protected. The County has maps of many known natural resources, so you may want to consult with County planners to see if any of these features exist on or near your site. Natural resources such as streams and wetlands have large setbacks or "buffers" that prohibit or limit development within a certain distance of the feature. The size of a buffer varies depending upon the resource and terrain, and each is described in Chapter 38 of the code.

Other natural resources, such as sensitive wildlife areas or sites containing rare native plant species trigger outside review by agencies such as the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife or Oregon Natural Heritage Program to ensure they are not adversely impacted by development. This review is done as part of the application process, and our planning staff will explain how to respond should an agency identify a potential impact.

The ideal situation is to keep uses and activities well away from resources and buffers. If your proposal can avoid resources and buffer areas, there will not be as many criteria for you to address. Having fewer criteria to address makes the application less complex, may shorten the review time, and could reduce costs by avoiding having to hire resource professionals such as biologists to perform wetland delineations and wildlife assessments.

## What is in this handout?

- Location on the site
- Cultural and Natural Resources and their buffers
- Scenic Resources
- Key Viewing Areas
- Visual Subordination from KVAs
- Design of buildings
- Compatibility with nearby development
- Template of a residential application

How do I know if the property is topographically visible from a key viewing area?

- Contact the County to look at the KVA maps.
- Go to a KVA and look at your property to see if the terrain is visible (or would be if trees were removed).



Sometimes it is not possible to stay out of a buffer area and still have use of your site, so the code allows for some level of impact on buffers, as long as there is compensation for the impact. You would likely be required to hire a professional (e.g., archaeologist, biologist, botanist) to help you outline the protected areas on your site and develop a mitigation plan. In some instances, you may need to hire a professional to “verify on the ground”—as opposed to from maps—that your proposal is in fact outside of protected resource areas. County planners will assist you with this.

## Scenic Resources

Question 2 above, has to do with protecting scenic resources in the National Scenic Area. All new buildings in the National Scenic Area need to be placed on a part of your site that results in the least amount of grading. The actual code language states:

*New buildings and roads shall be sited and designed to retain the existing topography and reduce necessary grading to the maximum extent practicable.*

This does not mean that grading is not allowed. However, when giving thought to where you want your building to be, you need to understand that in order for the location to be approved by the County, your application must demonstrate that the location you chose is the best or most reasonable one in terms of minimizing grading, given other constraints (like a buffer nearby). Protecting the scenic characteristics of the Columbia River Gorge is a primary goal of the Gorge Commission and Multnomah County and is a major reason for trying to retain existing topography.

A second reason is that the more people try to create level building sites, the harder it is for buildings to blend in with the surroundings and remain visually subordinate.

## Key Viewing Areas (KVAs)

Questions 3 and 4 under “Location of Your Site” introduce the concept of Key Viewing Areas (KVAs). KVAs are portions of important public roads, rivers, parks or other vantage points within the National Scenic Area from which the public views National Scenic Area landscapes. You will need to know if your site and any improvements (structures, etc.) can be seen from any of the KVAs because the design and siting of your proposed use or building must comply with additional scenic criteria that limit how much can be seen from the KVAs. Whether or not your site is visible from KVAs also affects the materials that you will need to submit with your application.

The KVAs for Multnomah County are listed in the sidebar.

The County has maps that identify whether or not a property is topographically visible from a particular KVA and our planning staff would be happy to assist you in identifying how these maps relate to your particular property. Once you know the KVAs to look for, you can figure out the degree to which your project might be visible by driving to them and taking a photograph from them looking towards your site. The photographs will help you to design the building in a way that limits its impact on the views from KVAs. Distance is a factor. If your property is several miles from a KVA, it is much easier to blend your project into the surrounding landscape. However, keep in mind that development that breaks the skyline, involves a substantial amount of grading or clearing, or includes the use of highly reflective materials will still be an issue.

If your property and/or development is not “topographically visible” from a KVA, then the scenic criteria will not apply to you. If your property is visible, the location on your site of a proposed new building becomes even more critical to obtaining approval for your project.

### KVAs in the GMA and SMA

- Beacon Rock
- Bonneville Dam Visitor Centers
- Bridal Veil State Park
- Cape Horn
- Columbia River
- Cook-Underwood Road
- Crown Point
- Dog Mountain Trail
- Historic Columbia River Highway
- Highway I-84, including rest stops
- Larch Mountain
- Multnomah Falls
- Oregon Highway 35
- Pacific Crest Trail
- Panorama Point Park
- Portland Women's Forum State Park
- Rooster Rock State Park
- Rowena Plateau and Nature
- Conservancy Viewpoint
- Sandy River
- Washington State Route 14
- Washington State Route 141
- Washington State Route 142

### In the SMA only:

- Larch Mountain Road
- Old Washington State Route 14 (County Road 1230)
- Sherrard Point on Larch Mountain
- Wyeth Bench Road



## Ensuring Visual Subordination from KVAs

The County code requires that each development be “visually subordinate in its setting” as seen from KVAs. This is a scenic standard that all new development must meet. Visually subordinate is defined as:

*The relative visibility of a structure where that structure does not noticeably contrast with the surrounding landscape, as viewed from a specified vantage point, generally a Key Viewing Area. Structures which are visually subordinate may be partially visible, but are not visually dominant in relation to their surroundings.*

When you are standing at the KVA from which your property can be seen, things that you will want to consider or even take notes on are:

- The amount of area of the potential building site that might be exposed to the KVA
- How existing vegetation on your property could provide screening of your future building
- The distance from the building site to the KVA
- Whether your site visible from more than one KVA
- If the KVA is a road, the distance along the road that your site is visible

Given that the goal is to help the proposed building blend with the surrounding area, thinking about these characteristics of the view from the KVA will help you to identify an appropriate location and design for your building (see below for more details on design). County staff, in reviewing your application, will be considering those issues too.

The scenic rules establish priorities for determining whether a chosen location is the best one, based on how the applicant proposes to achieve the standard of visual subordination. Priority is given to using aspects of the site that will provide the most screening from KVAs, particularly topography and existing trees and shrubbery on your property. Planting new trees and shrubbery is allowable, if the site lacks natural screening, but certainly siting is the first critical factor to the success of your proposal. For example, building a house or other structure in a dip in the ground would help screen it from view (because the higher ground around it would help obscure it). On the other hand, filling in the dip, placing the structure on top, then mounding earth in front of it to screen it is not as good a choice.

Some prohibitions in the National Scenic Area rules for new buildings include:

- Structures cannot break the skyline of a bluff, cliff or ridge, and
- Development cannot occur on slopes over 30%.

## Design of the Building

Once the location is determined, how the building is designed and placed will significantly impact the degree to which it is visible from KVA(s). The potential impact on visibility and dominance in the landscape depend on aspects of design, such as the wall area, the size and number of windows (which reflect light), the height of the building, its shape compared to surrounding natural shapes, the color of walls, trim, and roof, and the reflectivity of the building materials. Site placement (such as on an angle towards the KVA) and enhancing characteristics like deep eaves to shade windows, are examples of how these design characteristics can reduce the dominance of your building in the landscape to achieves the standard of visual subordination. Keep in mind that the optimal design for your building on your property will be influenced by its unique setting as well.

To assist property owners in the National Scenic Area, the Gorge Commission and Forest Service are developing a *Scenic Resources Implementation Handbook* that will include detailed design guidelines for applicants and planners. The *Handbook* is scheduled to be available in 2006. In the meantime, we recommend that you work with our planning staff and follow the design guidance in these handouts to make sure that your project meets scenic standards.



## Compatibility with Nearby Development

All new buildings must be "compatible with the general scale (height, dimensions and overall mass) of existing nearby development. This standard for compatibility is part of the code regulations to protect scenic resources that apply to all new development in the National Scenic Area (similar to the requirement to minimize changes to the topography).

In practical terms, this means designing a building that fits within the range of development within at least ¼ mile radius of your property. The visible mass of the building cannot be substantially larger than what exists in the area today. This means comparing the proposed development to a similar development. For example, if the proposed development is for a house, it will need to be compared to other houses in the area. An important comparison is the square footage. The County tax assessors' office can supply information about square footage of buildings in the area. The square footage of the proposed development needs to be within the range of the existing development.

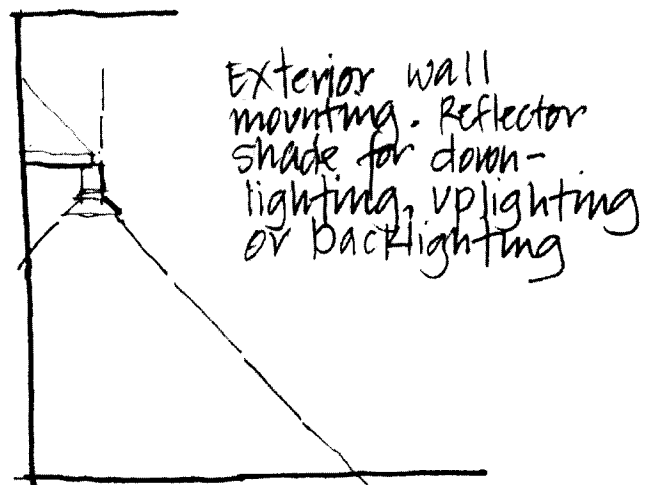
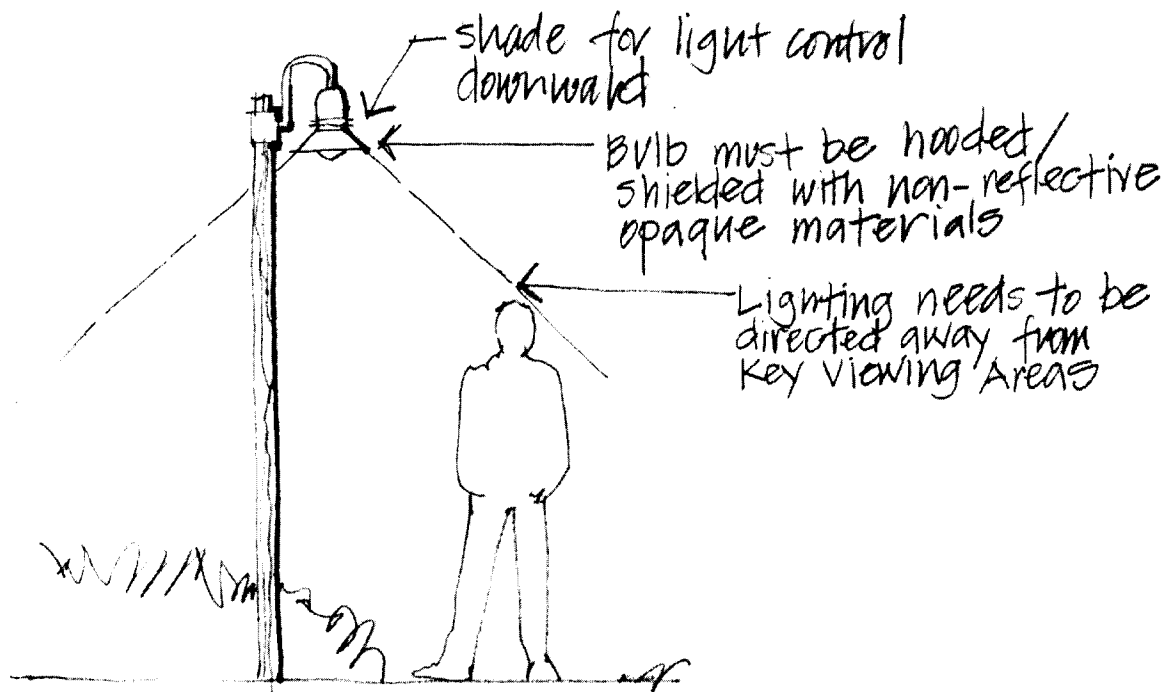
## Summary

This section summarizes the specific features of your proposal that will be evaluated in your application, and how they differ along a path of being desirable to being unacceptable. The more desirable the characteristics of your proposal, the faster and less complicated the review and approval may be.

	More Desirable	Less Desirable (possibly unacceptable)
Location on site	Build with existing topography	Significant grading for a building site
Location on site	Outside agricultural, cultural and natural resources and their buffers	Proposed to intrude into a buffer
Visibility from KVA(s)	Use topography and existing vegetation to screen (to suit the setting)	Grading a flat site where a rise would otherwise help hide a building; cutting down trees to make a view
Compatibility	No larger or higher than buildings on 10 adjacent properties	30% larger and taller than any building in the vicinity
Shape	Massing broken up	Unbroken mass, long expanses of wall or roof
Size	Smaller	Bigger
Color	Dark, earth tones	Light or bright colors, white window trim
Roof material	Dark, low reflective composite roofing	Metal, light colored or reflective
Orientation	At angle to KVA	Parallel and lengthwise to KVA
Reflectivity	Less glass facing a KVA	Lots of glass facing a KVA

## Template for a Residential Application, On Property as Seen From KVAs

Attached are plan and profile drawings illustrating many of these concepts. The drawings include examples of good design and bad design so that you can compare them and visualize the differences.

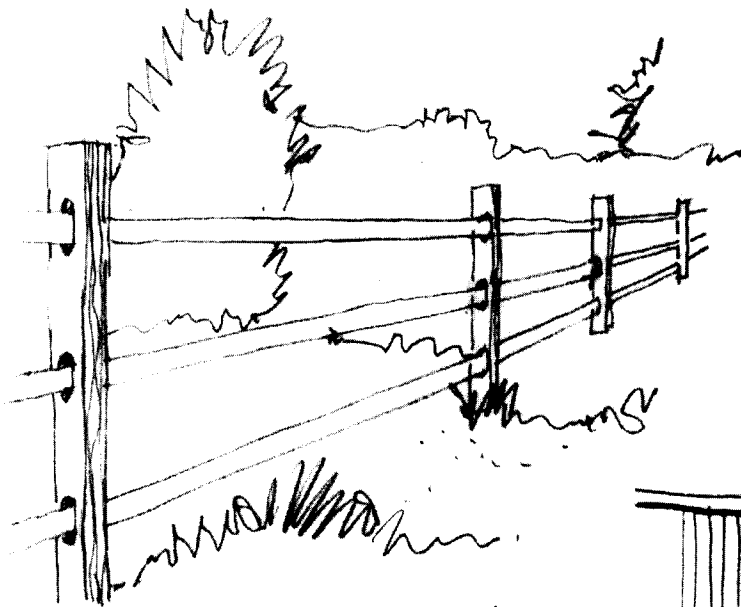


## Examples of shielded Lighting

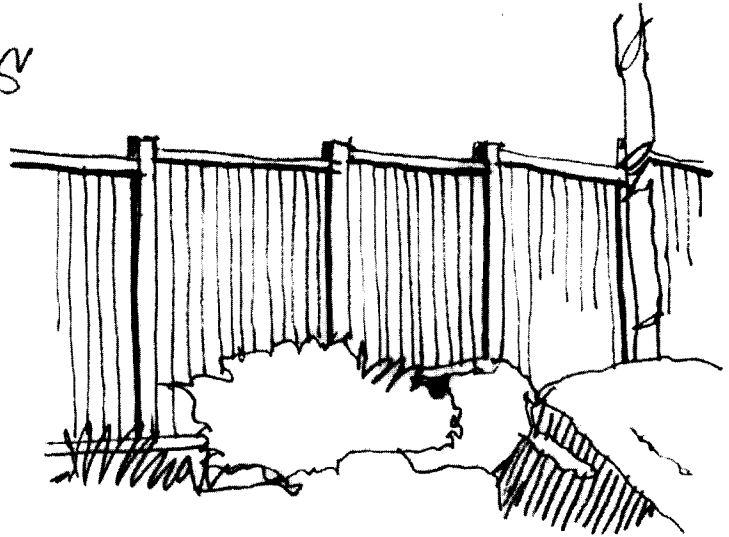


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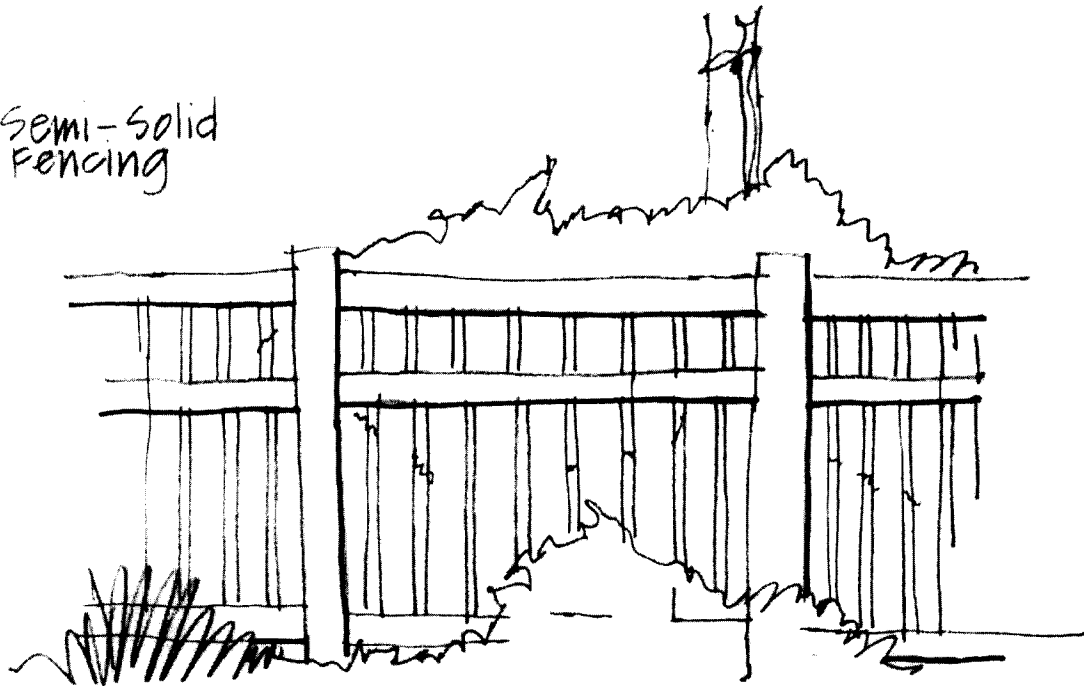


split rail  
fencing



solid  
fencing

semi-solid  
fencing

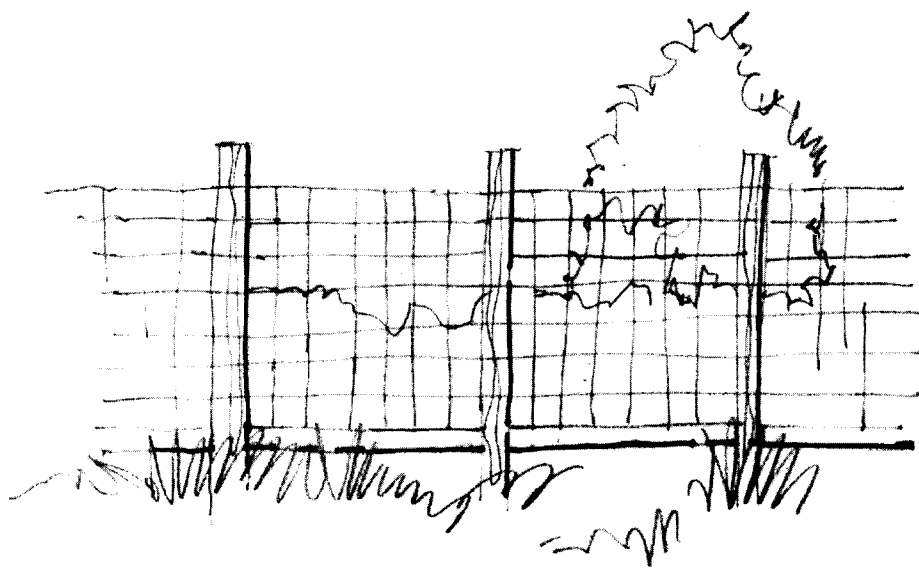


## Common Types of Fencing

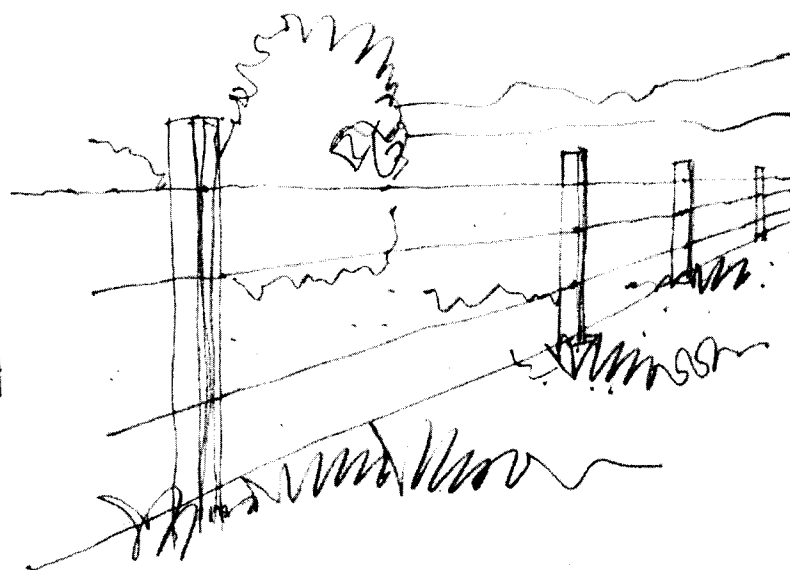


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Woven Wire  
Fencing



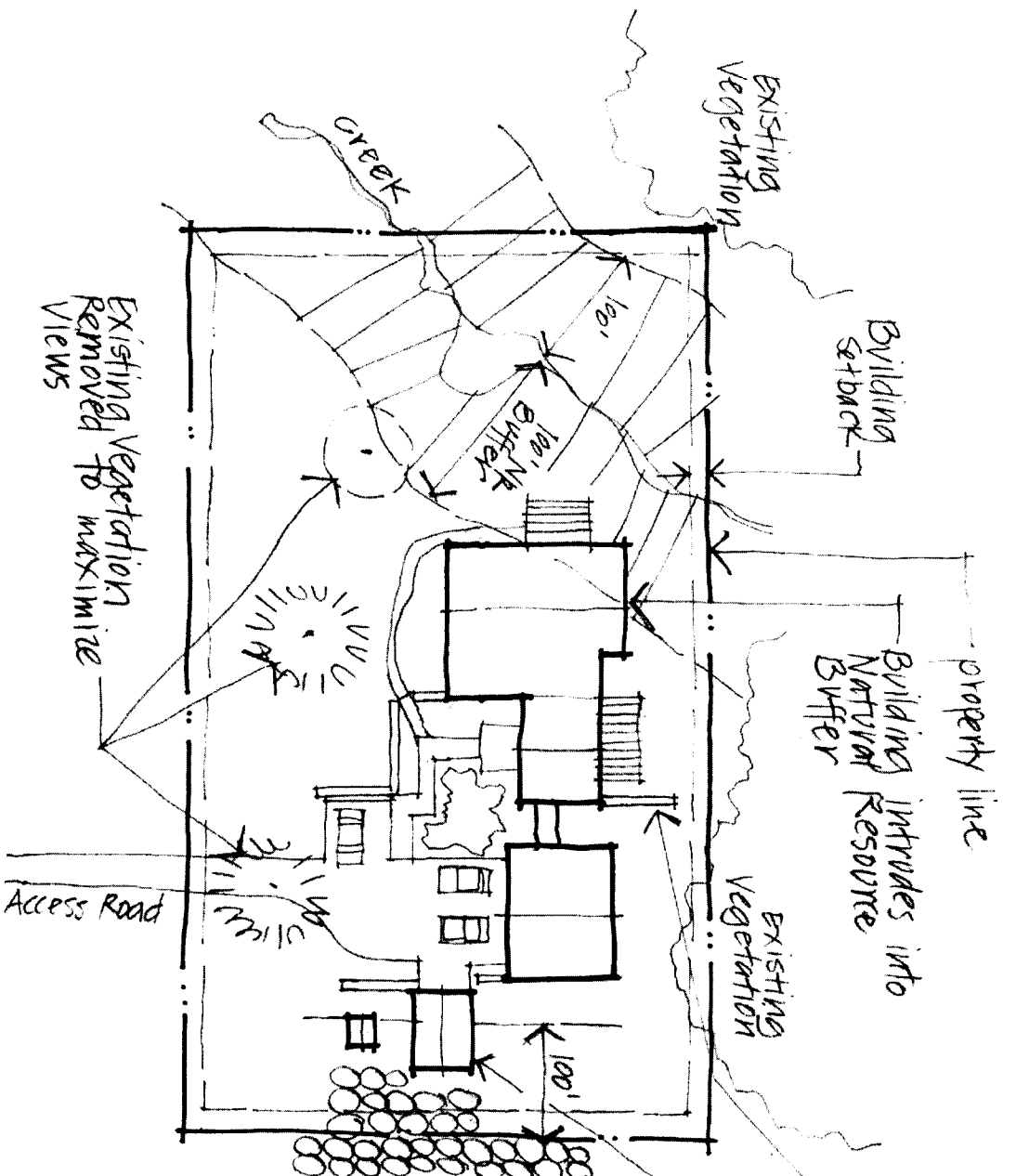
Wire strand  
Fencing

## Common Types of Fencing

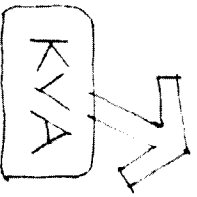


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- Retaining Wall to stabilize cut slopes (grading done instead of using natural grade of topography)
- Building intrudes into Agricultural Buffer
- crops
- Less Desirable Features:
  - Building color light w/ light colored or reflective metal roofing
  - unbroken building mass w/ long expansive walls
  - buildings 30% larger and taller than buildings in vicinity
  - Maximum removal of vegetation for views



BAD EXAMPLE OF SITING A RESIDENCE



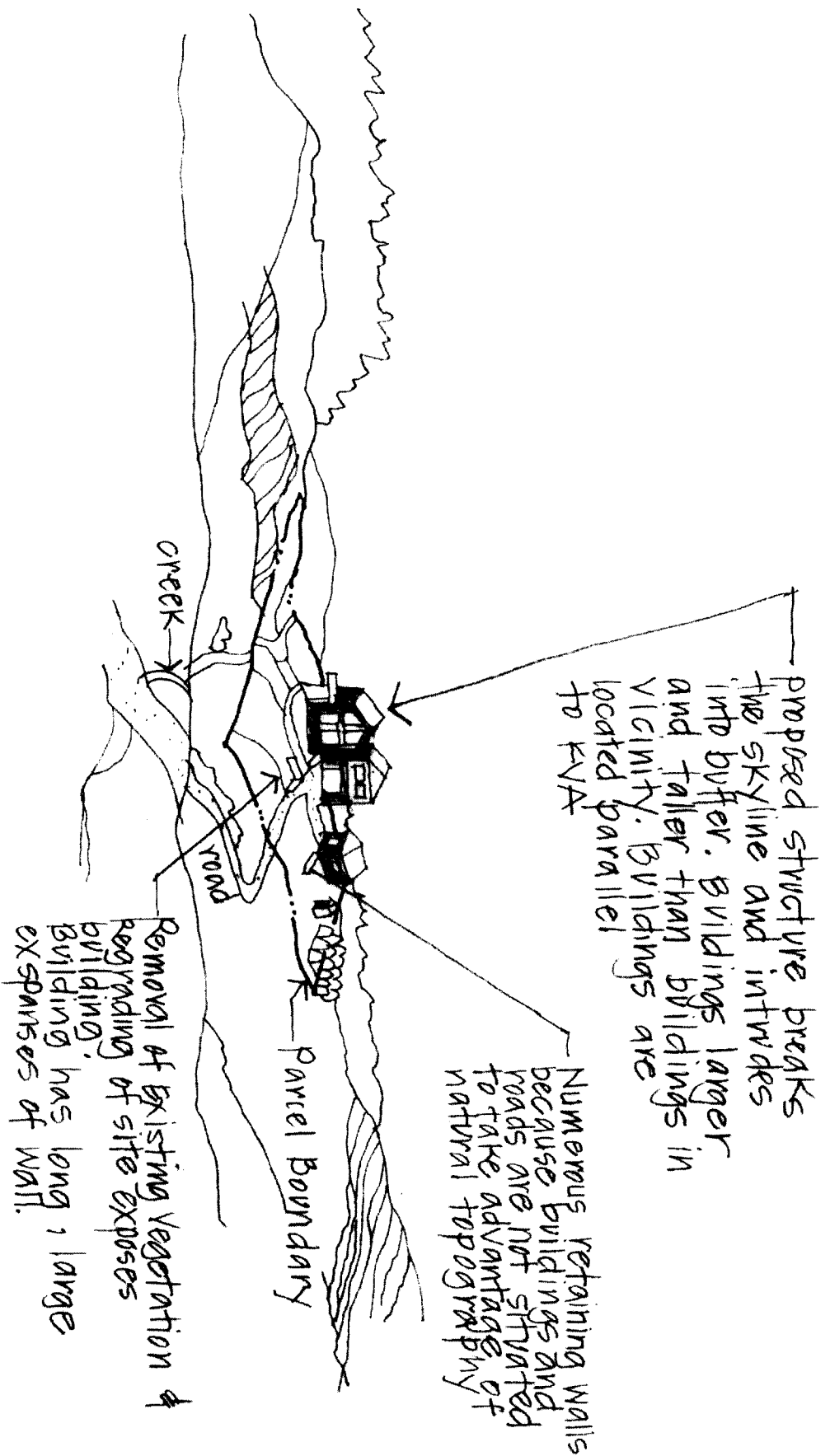
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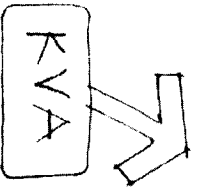
EXAMPLE OF BAD DESIGN,  
DEVELOPMENT THAT IS NOT  
VISUALLY SUBORDINATE

As viewed from  
KVA

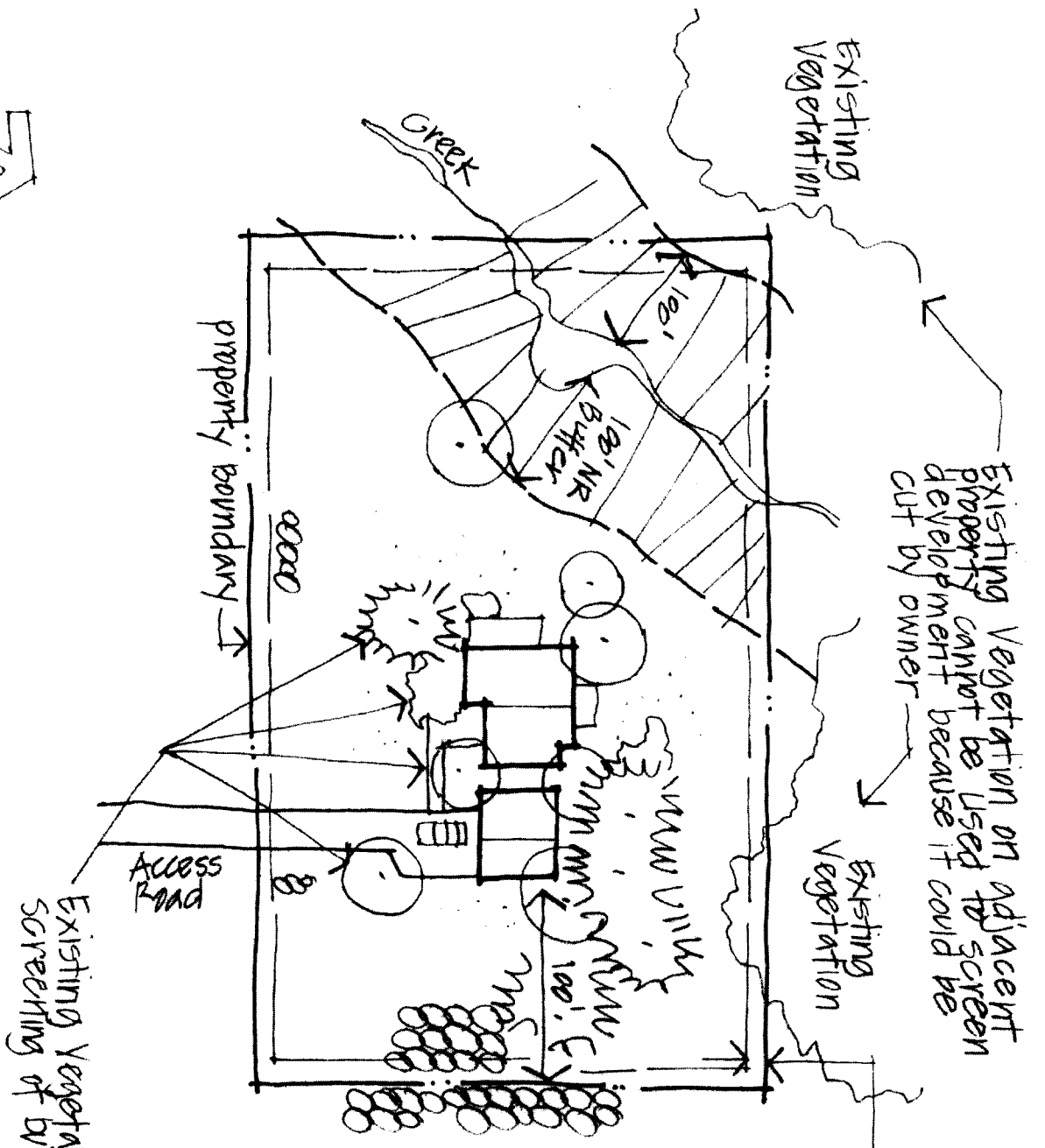


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GOOD EXAMPLE OF  
SITING A RESIDENCE



Verify Building setback  
and requirements  
with planning staff

Agricultural crops-  
agricultural buffer  
necessary even if crops  
are on adjacent property

Desireable  
features:

- Building color dark
- earth tones w/  
dark low reflective  
roofing
- massing of buildings  
broken up
- minimal site grading
- minimal removal  
of existing vegetation

Existing Vegetation provides  
screening of buildings

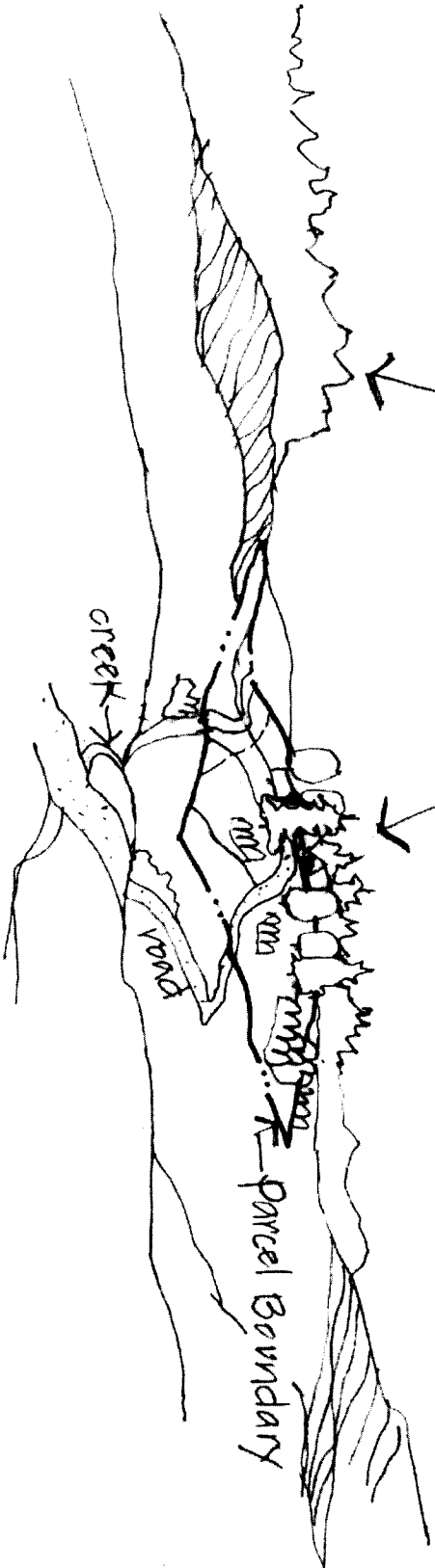


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Vegetation on adjacent property can not be used to provide screening of structures - only vegetation on site can be used

House and garage are screened by existing vegetation and terrain. House does not break skyline



GOOD EXAMPLE  
VISUAL SUBORDINANCE

As viewed from  
KVA



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