

PRINCIPLES OF GRADING PRESENTED

January 29, 2021

Landforms set the character of a location and are an element of the physical environment created over time. Landform includes the elements of soil composition and vegetation, and sometimes water. These elements, along with the constructed environment, combine to create the sense of character that an area is known for.

The Rancho Santa Fe community has always sought to protect and enhance the natural and rural nature of the Ranch. Changes in landform are often required to support home construction, but successful property development is achieved with a light and calculated approach that recognizes the original forces and forms of nature that originally made the slopes, hills, ridges and canyons of the Ranch.

In order to achieve a natural feeling that connects to existing landforms rather than clashing with them, certain principles need to be considered. These 10 principles include:

1. Understand the landform of the site; its curves, angles and gradations of slight change or abrupt changes like rock outcrops and escarpments.
2. Recognize that natural landforms are made up of patterns, but these patterns transition smoothly from one to another.
3. Nature avoids straight lines and landforms are generally curvilinear since landforms react to natural forces. The curves and transitions are subtle, and flat and inclined surfaces all eventually become rounded.
4. Working with a site (rather than against it) always results in the creation of a better homesite that feels natural and connected to the site.
5. Once a site is understood, the functions, views and orientation of the home naturally become apparent.
6. The less a site is changed, the more of the character remains, including vegetation.
7. New landforms should look like they belong with adjacent landforms and with the built and natural areas of the site.
8. Consider split-level homes that can work across a site; a few feet of vertical change in a home can hide changes in landforms and can be taken up with stairs or well-designed ramps.

9. To meet water quality mandates, the use of drainage swales, bio-swales and bio-basins can all be made to look natural through landform grading.
10. Planting should be used to screen areas, but also to highlight and integrate with the landforms.

When attention is paid to grading and the current conditions of a site, the project will be more successful and will fit better with the site. Proper grading does not have to cost much more if it is planned for early in the process. Once completed, the landform will increase the value of a property and will make for better relationships with neighbors. Overall, Rancho Santa Fe was historically described and prescribed to be agrarian in character and natural in form, and these principles will help in achieving this continued goal.