Residential Roof Decks
Roof Decks and Discretionary Reviews

- Increasing number of cases / amount of time spent on Discretionary Reviews on projects involving roof decks
Inconsistency of Outcome

- Over the Counter Permits vs. Discretionary Reviews
Quality of Life Impacts

- Privacy
- Intensity of use and programming
- Light / shadowing impacts
- Noise
- Visual clutter
  - Neighbors’ sight lines
  - Street views
- Light pollution
Roof Features Allowed by Code
Residential Design Guidelines

San Francisco Planning Department

Guidelines

December 2003
City and County of San Francisco

Residential Roof Decks

ROOFTOP ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES

GUIDELINE: Sensitive locate and screen rooftop features so they do not dominate the appearance of a building.

The appearance of a building is affected by the design and placement of all architectural features, including rooftop features. Rooftop features include stair penthouses, parapets, dormers, windows, and solar collection devices. They can dominate the appearance of a building and the block face if they are not sensitively located and screened.

The following design modifications may reduce the impact of rooftop features; other modifications may also be appropriate depending on the circumstances of a particular project:

- Locate rooftop features in a manner that minimizes their visibility from the street and reduces the effect of rooftop clutter.
- Design rooftop features with the smallest possible overall dimensions that meet the requirements of the Building and Planning Codes.
- Limit the number of rooftop features.

Stair Penthouses

GUIDELINE: Design stair penthouses to minimize their visibility from the street.

A stair penthouse is typically constructed to provide roof access for the building. Limit the size of the penthouse in order to reduce its visibility from the street and its impact on light to adjacent buildings. Stair penthouses may also be entirely eliminated through the use of roof hatches, courts with stairs, or exterior rear stairs to the roof.

Section drawing of a stair penthouse with a sloped roof.
Residential Design Guidelines

The following design modifications may reduce the impact of stair penthouses; other modifications may also be appropriate depending on the circumstances of a particular project:

- Slope the roof of the penthouse structure to follow the slope of the interior stairway.
- Locate the penthouse against the wall of an adjacent building.

**Windscreens**

**GUIDELINE:** Design windscreen to minimize impacts on the building's design and on light to adjacent buildings.

Windscreen provide protection for outdoor areas on rooftops. Design windscreen so they are compatible with the building's design and do not increase the building's apparent height. Also minimize the impact windscreen can have on light to adjacent buildings.

Consider the following in designing windscreen; other measures may also be appropriate depending on the circumstances of a particular project:

- Transparent windscreen are encouraged.
- The maximum recommended height of windscreen is eight feet.
- Where possible, locate the windscreen in a manner that minimizes their visibility from the street and surrounding properties.

**Parapets**

**GUIDELINE:** Design parapets to be compatible with overall building proportions and other building elements.

Parapet are parts of walls entirely above the surface of the roof. They are sometimes required for fire protection but they may also be decorative and can be used to screen roof features. Design parapets to be compatible with other building elements and overall building proportions. Using a fire-rated roof can eliminate the need for parapet wall, reducing the height of a building as viewed from the street or mid-block open space.

To minimize its visibility from the street, this windscreen is transparent and is set in from the front, rear and sides of the property.
Analysis and Recommendations

Photo credits: SF Gate Home
## Current Procedures

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## Proposed Procedures

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Recommendation: **Roof Deck Area**

1/3 OF ROOF AREA
Recommendation: **Roof Deck Area**

![Diagram of a roof deck with 1/3 of the roof area highlighted.](image.png)
Recommendation: **Roof Deck Area**
Recommendation: **Setbacks**
Recommendation: Setbacks
Access **Roof Hatch with Internalized Stairs**

- Roof hatches are allowed to access common or private roof decks in 1-2 unit buildings (per SFDBI AB57)

Photo credit: https://deavita.net/roof-hatch-ideas-roof-access-hatches.html

Photo credit: http://www.dayliter.com/roof-doors/roof-doors-glass.php
Access **Internalized Stairs**

- Open stairs are allowed to provide egress and roof access in buildings with 3 dwelling units or more (R-3 Occupancy)

Photo credit: http://www.amagansettbeachhouse.com/gallery/20140525-dsc_0784/
Ongoing Outreach

NEW: Draft on Roof Deck Policy

Roof decks are an opportunity to provide an outdoor amenity area to enrich open space. However, because of their elevated location, they also represent a potential increase of uses that can negatively impact adjacent residents. Therefore, such projects need to be carefully considered in the design review process.

The Planning Commission has asked the Planning Department to develop preliminary recommendations toward ensuring a consistent approach to evaluating rooftop features. This includes taking the following considerations:
Next Steps

- Additional Outreach
- Develop Implementation Tools
- Draft Resolution – Formal Planning Commission Hearing
- Residential Design Guidelines - Inclusion to RDG’s as appendix