



How the City Architect Helps Improve Hollywood Design

The City Architect in **West Hollywood** serves as a catalyst for design dialogue in the city.

In West Hollywood, the duty of the City Architect has been, in large part, running a studio within city government that helps define a vision of urban design in this vital part of Los Angeles county, one known for walkability and great architecture. The current West Hollywood City Architect, Ric Abramson, comes from a 30-plus year career as an architect in private practice, and works with a staff of two others.

What the City Architect Does

The City Architect runs a studio within city government that handles a few key roles, such as overseeing the city's Design Review process, and overseeing municipal architectural projects for the city of 43,000, including planning, programming, and design, as well as construction of capital improvement projects. It also plays a role with others to support public works investments, urban artwork, and city-owned property, as well as helping the long-range planning process.

The main focus is balancing short-term policy support with larger studies that focus on land use visioning and public space improvements. This includes working on standards and guidelines, such as the city's multi-family residential standards and a design guide for Eastside commercial space, as well as helping collect feedback and [make sure city projects](#) reflect the will of West Hollywood residents.

How the City Architect Shapes West Hollywood

The city architect role, created in 2019, was an effort by city council members to put a more direct focus on issues of design, sustainability and climate action. The idea was that uplifting design as a municipal focus would best be achieved by creating a central point person to provide guidance for new development. West Hollywood tends to think of itself as being a progressive city and needed more creative thinking when it came to working through the regulation, policy, and enforcement around the built environment. Part of the greater vision was to have a City Architect bring certainty to property owners and developers and provide definition and consistency to the building process.

- One of the main roles of the city architect has been maintaining and starting dialogues around important design topics in the city, including hosting forums that often shape local regulations.
- The City Architect also serves as a resource for designers. Recently, an affordable housing project that had just received funding realized it needed to add stormwater drainage that would add a substantial cost. By starting a dialogue with the City Architect, the project planner was able to find a cheaper way to add the needed infrastructure, and the project was able to move ahead.
- A big part of the job includes design review, where the City Architect helps push projects that showcase vivid design virtues, such as affordability and sustainability.



How the City Architect Has Helped West Hollywood

One of the significant achievements of the position so far has been bringing a larger focus to sustainability and biodiversity in design, a key agenda for one of the more urbanized stretches of Los Angeles county.

- The city architect has brought a heightened awareness of the tree canopy and shade and the importance promoting a good built and natural environment.
- Planning a new set of guidelines, called Healthy City by Design, that highlights the ways design can contribute to health and wellness
- Held an urban forestry symposium that helped facilitate the creation of new tree and landscaping standards for the city.
- Other forums and gatherings included a look at the changing relationship between public space and private space, and how the conventional distinctions have blurred, and a piece on the water was integrated into the city and its landscape.
- Going forward, the City Architect's office seeks to look at ways to require new changes to public property to play a more public role, to offset that loss of purely public space throughout the city.
- Moderate the public realm, especially sidewalks and public space, which tends to be overtaken by foot traffic, bikes, scooters, and even food delivery robots.
- The City Architect has also played a key role in larger community design projects like the STORIES: The AIDS Monument project, which will create a field of bronze statues reminiscent of a candlelight vigil, as is set to open later this year..
- The City Architect's office is also working on the [San Vicente Streetscape](#), which would transform a city block into a public space and multi-purpose urban park that has the potential to be a venue for the 2028 Olympics.

The City Architect's Role in the Architecture and Design Community

The consistent hosting of forums and meetings to discuss key topics has made the city architect a key catalyst in larger debates about policy and design principles. Part of the role means balancing conflicting resident desires—some want density and growth, others want preservation and continuity—and figuring out how to press for better design guidelines for the neighborhood scale.

What Success Looks Like

The City Architect best serves the city by meeting the needs of different audiences. For the local government staff attempting to oversee the evolving city, the position can become a trusted advisor and communicator who can bridge the gap between design, regulation, and governance. Another key metric is money saved, often through spotting and resolving issues early and serving as a sounding board for aspiring architects. Finally, the job entails elevating community awareness of the value added by good design and more efficient regulation of the work of architects. There's hope to expand the staff to be able to more quickly serve designers working in West Hollywood.