

PLANNING AND ZONING COMMISSION

Proposal for an Exposed Foundation Wall Treatment Standard

A clear architectural-finish requirement for foundation and basement walls remaining visible after final grading

To: Town of Alpine Planning and Zoning Commission

From: Planning and Zoning Administrator

Purpose: Discussion and policy direction for the LUDC redesign

Status: Working proposal — subject to Commission, Building Official, engineering, and legal review

Recommended approach: Require an approved, durable architectural finish when more than 50 percent of the horizontal length of any exterior building elevation has more than 12 inches of concrete or concrete-masonry foundation or basement wall exposed above adjacent final grade. The combined 12-inch/50-percent test is a starting recommendation for Commission discussion.

1. Issue

Alpine's LUDC should address whether large areas of unfinished concrete or concrete masonry may remain visible after final grading. On sloped sites and walkout-basement designs, a structurally compliant foundation can become a prominent exterior wall. The concern is architectural appearance and neighborhood compatibility—not whether the lower level is classified as a basement or story above grade under the IRC.

A measurable threshold and defined finish standard would give applicants notice during design, allow the requirement to be shown on elevations, and permit verification before final approval.

2. Proposed policy

- Apply the standard to new principal buildings, additions that create or expose foundation walls, and replacement foundation walls. Do not make it retroactive to lawful existing construction unless the affected wall is reconstructed or substantially altered.
- Measure exposure vertically from adjacent final grade to the bottom of the approved exterior wall cladding or finish at each point along the exterior wall.
- Determine the percentage separately for each building elevation. When more than 50 percent of an elevation's horizontal foundation-wall length has exposure exceeding 12 inches, finish the full exposed foundation or basement wall area on that elevation.
- Apply the requirement to all building elevations, including walkout basements, while allowing stated exceptions for openings and code-required clearances.

- Require the finish to be durable, weather-resistant, compatible with the building, and suitable for the substrate and its proximity to grade.
- Verify compliance after final grading and before final approval or issuance of a certificate of occupancy.

3. How exposure would be measured

Exposure should be measured after final grading is complete. At any point along the wall, the vertical distance would be measured from the finished ground surface immediately adjacent to the wall to the lower edge of the building's approved exterior cladding or other compliant architectural finish.

Example: A 40-foot exterior elevation has 18 inches of exposure along 24 feet of its length. Because 24 feet is 60 percent of the elevation, the combined 12-inch/50-percent test is met and the full exposed foundation area on that elevation must receive an approved architectural finish.

The final grading plan and exterior elevations should identify anticipated exposure. A final inspection or as-built elevation documentation should confirm that the treatment extends to the completed grade without interfering with drainage, waterproofing, termite inspection zones, ignition-resistant construction, or other applicable code requirements.

4. Recommended treatment materials

The Code should describe performance and appearance rather than rely on one product. Potential compliant treatments include:

- Natural stone, brick, or manufactured masonry veneer listed or approved for the proposed installation and proximity to grade;
- Cement-based stucco, parging, or another integral cementitious finish system;
- Architecturally textured, patterned, board-formed, or exposed-aggregate concrete;
- Decorative concrete masonry units or an approved masonry facing;
- Cementitious panels, siding, or another cladding specifically rated for the substrate, weather exposure, clearances, and near-grade conditions; or
- Another durable architectural treatment approved by the Administrator and Building Official as substantially equivalent.

Unfinished concrete, unfinished concrete block, temporary coatings, landscaping, soil, mulch, snow, or stored materials should not qualify as decorative treatment. The Commission should decide whether paint or a durable architectural coating alone may qualify, and if so, under what conditions.

5. Exceptions and special conditions

The standard should not require decorative material where it would conflict with another health, safety, drainage, or building-code requirement. Potential exceptions include:

- Window wells, basement egress openings, doors, vents, utility penetrations, and similar functional openings;
- Required clearances from earth, paving, roofing, decks, or combustible construction;
- A required termite inspection or treatment zone;
- Portions of walls concealed by a permitted deck, porch, or permanent structure, provided unfinished areas are not visible from ordinary exterior viewpoints;
- Temporary exposure during construction; and
- A technically justified alternative approved by the Building Official where the decorative system would impair waterproofing, drainage, structural performance, or code compliance.

Landscaping may supplement the architectural treatment but should not replace it because vegetation is seasonal, may die, and can obscure drainage or maintenance conditions.

6. Required plan documentation

- Exterior elevations showing existing and proposed grades and the anticipated vertical exposure of foundation and basement walls;
- A final grading plan coordinated with the building elevations;
- Identification of the proposed finish material, color, extent, transition details, and manufacturer installation limitations where applicable;
- Details at window wells, doors, corners, decks, utility penetrations, and changes in grade;
- Documentation that the selected system is suitable for the substrate and proposed proximity to grade; and
- Final inspection or as-built documentation confirming final grade and completed treatment before final approval or a certificate of occupancy.

7. Draft LUDC language for discussion

Exposed Foundation or Basement Wall

The exterior portion of a concrete, concrete-masonry, or similar foundation or basement wall located above the adjacent final grade and below the approved exterior wall cladding or architectural finish.

Treatment Standard

Where more than fifty percent (50%) of the horizontal length of any exterior building elevation has a foundation or basement wall exposed more than twelve (12) inches vertically above adjacent final grade, the full exposed foundation or basement wall area on that elevation shall be finished with an approved durable architectural treatment. The percentage shall be calculated separately for each exterior elevation using the horizontal length of foundation or basement wall along that elevation. The treatment shall be compatible with the building's exterior design and suitable for the substrate, weather exposure, and proximity to grade. Approved treatments may include brick, natural or manufactured stone, cement-based stucco or parging, decorative or patterned concrete, decorative concrete masonry,

cementitious cladding rated for the installation, or another substantially equivalent material approved by the Administrator and Building Official. Unfinished concrete or concrete masonry shall not constitute an architectural treatment.

Measurement and Verification

Exposure shall be measured vertically after final grading from the adjacent finished ground surface to the lower edge of the approved exterior wall cladding or architectural finish. Plans shall show anticipated exposure and treatment. Required treatment shall be completed and verified before final approval or issuance of a certificate of occupancy.

Exceptions

This section does not require treatment within window wells, doors, vents, utility penetrations, required inspection zones, or locations where the Building Official determines that the treatment would conflict with required drainage, waterproofing, structural performance, fire-resistance, ignition-resistant construction, or another applicable code requirement. An approved exception shall be limited to the minimum area necessary.

8. Additional implementation decisions

- Select the exposure threshold: 6 inches, 12 inches, 24 inches, or another measurement.
- Confirm whether the 50-percent calculation should be made separately for each elevation, around the total building perimeter, or by another method, and specify how openings and stepped wall segments are treated.
- Decide whether treatment is required on every elevation or only walls visible from streets, parks, neighboring properties, or other public viewpoints.
- Determine whether paint or an architectural coating alone may qualify and establish durability and maintenance standards.
- Finalize approved and prohibited materials, including product requirements near or below grade.
- Determine applicability to accessory structures, additions, manufactured homes, commercial buildings, and existing buildings undergoing substantial alteration.
- Coordinate final language with the Building Official regarding clearances, waterproofing, drainage, termite inspection, fire requirements, and manufacturer instructions.
- Establish review authority for equivalent materials, hardship conditions, enforcement, and maintenance of required finishes.

9. Recommended Commission direction

Staff recommends directing the LUDC consultant to use the combined 12-inch/50-percent test as the initial threshold. If the test is met on an exterior elevation, the full exposed foundation area on that elevation would require a durable architectural treatment. Limited code-compliance exceptions and the implementation decisions in Section 8 should return for technical review and Commission direction.