

Incentive Zoning Update

Proposed Standards for Urban Plazas

May 2018

This document contains draft standards that are being proposed for Urban Plaza amenities achieved through incentive zoning. This Urban Plaza amenity option that would replace five separate amenity options existing today (Urban Plaza, Neighborhood Open Space, and three types of Parcel Parks). The final standards, once adopted, would reside in the Land Use Code. These standards are being proposed as part of initial proposal for updating Incentive Zoning. More information on the update is available at: www.seattle.gov/opcd/ongoing-initiatives/incentive-zoning-update.

A. Purpose. Urban plazas are publicly accessible open spaces that are intended to provide places for passive relaxation, recreation, and gathering; add greenery; increase light access to the street level; and provide beauty and character for all users in the vicinity. Ideally, urban plaza should be designed to:

1. minimize physical barriers between public streets and spaces in order to create welcoming spaces;
2. maximize direct and reflected light access to the urban plaza and sidewalk, particularly during lunch hours for office buildings;
3. incorporate high-quality design and construction to create spaces that are usable, attractive, and memorable, and reflect the character of the neighborhood;
4. respond to the circulation patterns of the sidewalk and adjacent buildings to encourage people to enter and spend time in the plaza while ensuring it does not function only as circulation; and
5. integrate the urban plaza and adjacent buildings by providing windows and active ground floor uses, particularly retail and restaurants, to help activate the urban plaza and provide incidental monitoring and safety

B. Location.

1. The urban plaza must be provided at ground level, except that to provide level open spaces on steep lots, terracing on multiple levels is allowed, provided they are physically and visually connected.
2. The urban plaza should be located to maximize direct and/or reflected solar access. Urban Plazas must be located on the portion of the site that is facing south or within 75 degrees of south. Preferable plaza locations are to the south of tower development, or where the siting of the plaza would improve solar access to the sidewalk.

C. Access & Hours.

1. The urban plaza must be directly accessible from the sidewalk.
2. The floor of the plaza must be generally level except as needed to accommodate changes in the grade of the sidewalk and allow limited integrated seating like amphitheaters. The level of the plaza should generally match sidewalk grade. At no point may the elevation of the floor, excluding allowed planting beds and furnishings, be:
 - a. more than 2 feet lower than sidewalk grade at the lowest entrance to the plaza

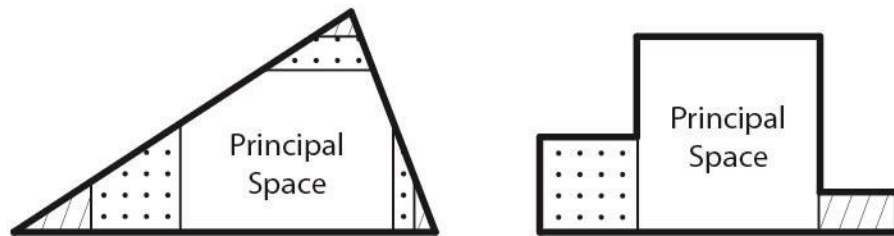
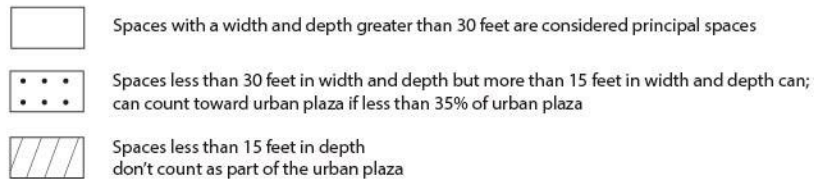
- b. more than 2 feet higher than the sidewalk grade at the highest entrance to the plaza; or
 - c. more than 4 feet lower or higher than the sidewalk grade of the closest street, measured perpendicular to that street.
3. Within the first 15 feet from a street line, at least 50 percent of the width measured perpendicular to the street shall be free from obstructions, excluding railings necessary for stairs, light fixtures, and required public access signage.
 4. The opening of an urban plaza onto a Class 1 Pedestrian Street may not exceed 120 feet in width.
 5. Urban plazas at corner locations must be accessible from both streets.
 6. No fences, gates, or barriers, permanent or movable, are allowed in the urban plaza or between the urban plaza and a street with an entrance to the urban plaza except the following:
 - a. allowed furnishings no more than 3 feet in height;
 - b. planting beds no more than 20 inches in height, excluding vegetation,
 - c. fences no more than 42 inches in height that where necessary to enclose seating reserved for customers of restaurants or other uses abutting the urban plaza, allowed under section C.10; or
 - d. fences, railing, or other barriers necessary to accommodate grade changes or comply with ADA standards.
 7. Urban plazas must be open and accessible to the general public, without charge, from 6 am to 10 pm every day.
 8. During the hours of operation set in subsection C.7, except for seating reserved for customers of restaurants or other uses permitted pursuant to subsection C.10, property owners, tenants, and their agents shall allow individuals to engage in activities allowed in the public sidewalk environment, except that those activities that would require a street use permit if conducted on the sidewalk may be excluded or restricted. Free speech activities such as hand billing, signature gathering, and holding signs, all without obstructing access to the space, the building, or other adjacent amenity features, and without unreasonably interfering with the enjoyment of the space by others, shall be allowed. While engaged in allowed activities, members of the public may not be asked to leave for any reason other than conduct that unreasonably interferes with the enjoyment of the space by others.
 9. Public access may be limited temporarily for necessary maintenance or for reasons of public safety during hours when an amenity feature is otherwise required to be open to the public.
 10. Up to 15% of the urban plaza may be used for seating reserved for customers of restaurants or other uses abutting the urban plaza.

D. Layout.

1. The minimum size of an urban plaza is 2,500 square feet.
2. Each urban plaza must have a principal space that contains at least 65 percent of the total plaza area and meets the following criteria:
 - a. the principal space must have a minimum width and depth of 30 feet at all points.
 - b. the principal space must have a shape and dimensions shall be such that all points within the major portion shall be visible when viewed perpendicular from an adjacent street with an entrance to the urban plaza. For purposes of this subsection, visibility between points shall not be affected by permitted obstructions within a plaza or by changes of grade.

- c. the principle space must be directly accessible from the sidewalk.
- 3. All areas outside of the principle space must be contiguous with the principal space have a minimum dimension of 15 feet.
- 4. Urban plazas should not serve primarily as a forecourt to a project's principal entrance. When a plaza is located between the street and a principal building entrance, a path from the street to the project entrance should be located to the edge of the plaza, and an area along this path fifteen feet wide may not count toward the bonus.

Exhibit: Layout of Urban Plazas



E. Landscaping and Furnishings

1. Landscaping covering at least 25 percent of the urban plaza must be provided. Landscaping may consist of trees, shrubs, and/or ground cover. All required landscaping shall be located in permanently installed beds or planters or in containers with a minimum dimension of 3 feet by 3 feet.
2. One lineal foot of seating should be provided for every 30 square feet of plaza. Seating may include fixed individual seats, fixed benches with and without backs, and/or design-feature seating such as seat walls, planter ledges, or seating steps. Qualifying seats must have a height of 16 to 20 inches and a minimum depth of 18 inches. Steps less than 16 inches in height may not count as seats. Movable seats may only count toward this standard on urban plazas over 6,000 square feet in size and only for up to 30% of the total seating. Seating reserved for customers of restaurants or other uses abutting the urban plaza may not count toward more than 15% of the requirements of this section E.2.
3. Art must be provided in the urban plaza. Artwork may include but is not limited to two- or three-dimensional works in media such as painting, textiles, photography, ceramics, wood, paper, metal, or stone. Artwork may also include fountains, mobiles, special wall or paving surfaces, bas-reliefs, mosaics, murals, landscaping elements, and other decorative elements. Corporate logos or advertising may not be considered artwork. Public Art may be located in landscaped area.

4. At least one trash and one recycling receptacle, each with a minimum capacity of 32 gallons, shall be provided for every 2,000 square feet of urban plaza, except that no more than 3 litter receptacles shall ever be required.
5. Urban plazas shall be illuminated with a minimum level of illumination of not less than two horizontal foot candles (lumens per foot) throughout all walkable and sitting areas, and a minimum level of illumination of not less than 0.5 horizontal foot candles (lumens per foot) throughout all other areas. Uplighting fixtures are not allowed.

F. Coverage. Urban plazas must be open to the sky, except that up to 20 percent of the urban plaza may be covered by permanent overhead weather protection. Permanent overhead weather protection is not allowed over a landscaped area. Temporary kiosks, displays, art exhibits, table umbrella, and retail stalls may be permitted, provided they are portable and do not restrict public access and use of the amenity feature or restrict pedestrian circulation.

G. Street-level uses. For urban plazas that abut a street where street-level uses are required, street-level uses including direct access to the plaza are required to occupy at least 40 percent of the perimeter of the urban plaza.

H. Use of Bonused Public Spaces. No urban plaza may be used for storage or for a driveway, parking area, or loading berth.

I. Maintenance. The property owner shall maintain all elements of the amenity feature, including but not limited to landscaping, seating, and lighting, in a safe, clean, and well-maintained condition.

J. Signage. The urban plaza shall be identified clearly with a plaque placed at a visible location at each street entrance providing access to the amenity feature. The plaque shall include the City's public open space logo and indicate, in letters legible to passersby, the nature of the amenity feature, its availability for general public access, access hours, and additional directional information as required by the Director.