Design Review: Guidelines for Multifamily & Commerical Buildings

Amended Section D

Includes new guidelines D-8 through D-12, plus minor revisions to ensure consistency with existing neighborhood-specific design guidelines

Adopted by Ordinance 122311

effective Jan. 20, 2007

D. Pedestrian Environment

D-1 Pedestrian Open Space and Entrances

Convenient and attractive access to the building's entry should be provided. To ensure comfort and security, paths and entry areas should be sufficiently lighted and entry areas should be protected from the weather. Opportunities for creating lively, pedestrian-oriented open spaces should be considered.

Explanation and Examples

In business districts where pedestrian activity is desired, the primary function of any space between commercial buildings and the sidewalk is to provide visual and physical access into the building, and where possible, a space for additional outdoor activities such as vending, sitting or dining. Street fronts can also feature art work, street furniture, kiosks and landscaping that invite pedestrians to linger, thus activating commercial areas.

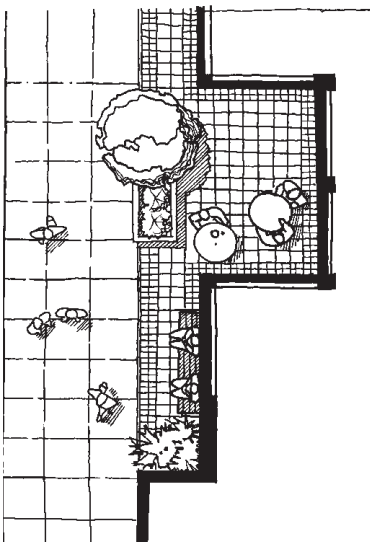
Where a commercial, mixed-use or residential building is set back from the sidewalk a sufficient distance, pedestrian enhancements such as those listed below should be considered in the resulting street front design:

- accented paving or walking surfaces
- street furniture such as benches or seating ledges built into the building or incorporated within landscaping features, and bicycle racks
- landscaping that enhances the space and helps to soften the zone where the building meets the sidewalk
- art that expresses local character
- visual and pedestrian access into the site from the public sidewalk
- overhead weather protection in the form of canopies, awnings, arcades or other elements of appropriate width
- signage appropriately scaled to pedestrians (see D-9)
- pedestrian-scale lighting and marquees (see D-10)

Overhead weather protection provides shelter for pedestrians and may add detail to a building's facade.

Seating ledges built into the facade can provide comfort and help to activate the street front.

Incorporating art into a building's street-level facade adds interest to the street front and can help to express local character.



Building setbacks can create active public spaces that can compliment surrounding uses.

Pedestrian Space

Street-level pedestrian spaces such as plazas or parcel parks can be created in building setbacks. These spaces should enliven the pedestrian experience while enhancing surrounding businesses. The following are some considerations for creating comfortable and inviting spaces that are open to the public:

- Provide seating in the form of fixed benches, ledges, landscaping features or movable furniture.
- Orient surrounding building(s) and entrances so that activity "spills" into the public space.
- Include details on the facades of surrounding buildings which add visual interest to the space.
- Incorporate public art or other elements such as fountains, which express neighborhood character.
- Use a change in paving color, pattern or texture to help define the public space and add visual interest.
- Incorporate ample landscaping in beds or planters which provide year-round greenery.
- Ensure visibility into and out of the space.
- Use adequate lighting to provide a sense of security and to add ambience during evening hours.

Pubic art elements help to activate public spaces and express local character.

Building form, plantings and a change in paving material help to create an intimate public space.

Ensure visibility into and out of public spaces.

Vegetation planted on or in front of blank walls helps to soften them, creating a more comfortable pedestrian street front.

Overhanging vegetation visually reduces the expanse of blank walls.

Incoporating art adds visual interest to a blank wall.

D-2 Blank Walls and D-3 Retaining Walls

Buildings should avoid large blank walls facing the street, especially near sidewalks. Where blank walls are unavoidable, they should receive design treatment to increase pedestrian comfort and interest.

Retaining walls near a public sidewalk that extend higher than eye level should be avoided where possible. Where high retaining walls are unavoidable, they should be designed to reduce their impact on pedestrian comfort and to increase the visual interest along the streetscape.

Explanation and Examples

A wall may be considered "large" if it has a blank surface substantially greater in size than similar walls of neighboring buildings. The following are examples of design solutions for blank walls and retaining walls:

- creating small setbacks, indentations, or employing changes in material color, texture and pattern breaks up the wall surface and creates a more human-scale
- setting the wall back and providing a landscaped or raised planter bed in front of the wall, including plant materials that could grow to screen the wall
- installing a durable vertical trellis in front of or on the wall for climbing vines or other plant material
- providing art (mosaic, mural, decorative masonry pattern, sculpture, relief, etc.) over a substantial portion of the blank wall surface

For retaining walls:

- terracing and landscaping
- using stone walls, rockeries, modular masonry or other high quality materials that add visual interest
- adding hanging plant materials below or above the wall

D-4 Design of Parking Lots Near Sidewalks

Parking lots near sidewalks should provide adequate security and lighting, avoid encroachment of vehicles onto the sidewalk, and minimize the visual clutter of parking signs and equipment.

Examples

The following examples illustrate some considerations to address in highly visible parking lots in commercial areas.

Signs and equipment

- Reduce sign clutter by painting markings on the pavement or by consolidating signs.
- Any on-site storage should be out of view or appropriately screened from the sidewalk and adjacent properties.

Security lighting

- Provide the appropriate levels of lighting to create adequate visibility at night. Evenly distributed lighting increases security, and glare-free lighting reduces impacts on adjacent properties.

Screening of parking

- Screening of parking areas need not be uniform along the property frontage. Variety in the type and relative amount of screening may be appropriate.
- Screen walls constructed of durable, attractive materials need not extend above waist level. Screen walls adjacent to residential zones could also include landscaping or a trellis or grillwork with climbing vines.
- Screening can be designed to allow clear visibility into parking areas to promote personal safety.
- Screening that incorporates pedestrian amenities such as seating is preferred.

Parking area containment

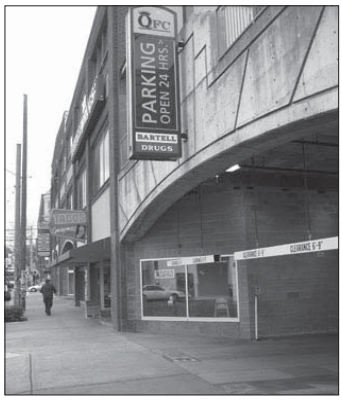
- Provide a "wheel stop" at the perimeter of parking areas between parking lot pavement and adjacent landscaping or other pavement to alleviate unsightly edge conditions.
- Tire bumpers, a low wall, or an extended curb prevent parked cars from encroaching on landscaped or pedestrian areas. Extended curbs are preferable because they are more durable and do not catch debris.

Tire bumpers keep cars from encroaching onto sidewalk.

Provide a "wheel stop" at the perimeter of parking areas.

Screen walls may be softened by incorporating landscaping.

Screen walls no higher than waist-level allow visibility into and out of parking area and can provide seating ledges for pedestrians.



Retail spaces incorporated along street-front facade of a parking structure

Parking access can be located off an alley.

Well-designed screening can add visual interest to structures along the street front.

Visually integrate parking entrances with the overall architecture of the building and use non-opaque garage doors.

D-5 Visual Impacts of Parking Structures

The visibility of all at-grade parking structures or accessory parking garages should be minimized. The parking portion of a structure should be architecturally compatible with the rest of the structure and streetscape. Open parking spaces and carports should be screened from the street and adjacent properties.

Examples

- Incorporating any of the blank wall treatments listed in Guideline D-6.
- Incorporating active retail spaces reduces the visual impact of parking structures in commercial areas and creates activity along the street front.
- Visually integrating the parking structure/entrance into the overall architecture of the whole project by continuing a frieze, cornice, canopy, overhang, trellis or other devices from adjacent structures along the façade of parking structure.
- Reducing the size of garage entrances lessens the visual impact it will have on the street front.
- Using recessed lighting or using baffles or valances deep enough to screen interior light sources.

Smaller garage entrances have less visual impact on the street front.

D-6 Screening of Dumpsters, Utilities and Service Areas

Building sites should locate service elements like trash dumpsters, loading docks and mechanical equipment away from the street front where possible. When it is not possible to locate these elements away from the street front, they should be screened from view using high-quality and compatible materials and should not be located in the pedestrian right-of-way.

Service elements should be placed out of view.

Explanation and Examples

Unsightly service elements can detract from the compatibility of new projects and create hazards for pedestrians and autos.

Screening service areas and utilities

- Plan the feature in a less visible location on the site.
- Screen it to be less visible.
- Use durable materials that complement the building.
- Incorporate landscaping to make the screen more effective.
- Locate the opening to the area away from the sidewalk.

Screen service elements using high-quality and compatible materials.

D-7 Personal Safety and Security

Project design should consider opportunities for enhancing personal safety and security in the environment under review.

Explanation and Examples

Project design should be reviewed for its contribution to enhancing the real and perceived feeling of personal safety and security within the environment under review. To do this, the question needs to be answered: Do the design elements detract from or do they reinforce feelings of security in the residents, workers, shoppers and visitors who enter the area?

Techniques that can help promote safety include the following:

- providing adequate lighting
- retaining clear lines of sight
- use of semi-transparent security screening, rather than opaque walls, where appropriate
- avoiding blank, windowless walls that attract graffiti and that do not permit residents or workers to observe the street
- use of landscaping that maintains visibility, such as short shrubs and pruning trees so there are no branches below head height
- creative use of ornamental grille as fencing or over ground-floor windows in some locations
- absence of structures that provide hiding places for criminal activity
- design of parking areas to allow natural surveillance by maintaining clear lines of sight both for those who park there and for occupants of nearby buildings
- clear directional signage
- encouraging "eyes on the street" through the placement of windows, balconies and street-level uses
- ensuring natural surveillance of children's play areas
- Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles should be reviewed and where appropriate incorporated into the priority guidelines for site and structure. Refer to "Defensible Space" by Oscar Newman, available online.

D-8 Treatment of Alleys

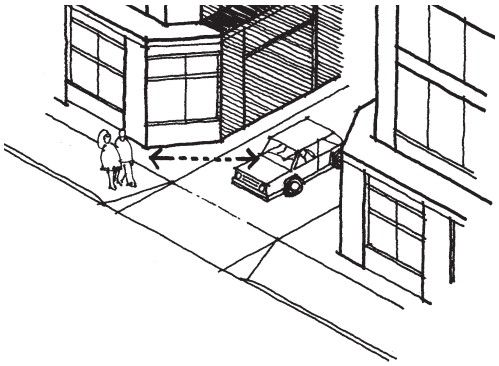
The design of alley entrances should enhance the pedestrian street front.

Explanation and Examples

Providing activity and visibility at the entrances to alleys increases safety and visibility.

Alleys

- Activate alley entrances and enhance the street front by extending street front fenestration into the alley one window bay.
- Chamfer building corners to improve visibility and safety for pedestrians and vehicles.
- Add effective lighting to enhance visibility and safety.



Chamfered building corners enhance visibility into and out of alleys.

Extend street front fenestration of retail spaces into the alley one window bay.

D-9 Commercial Signage

Signs should add interest to the street front environment and should be appropriate for the scale and character desired in the area.

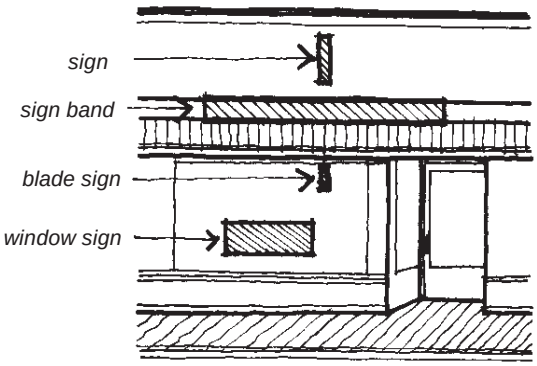
Explanation and Examples

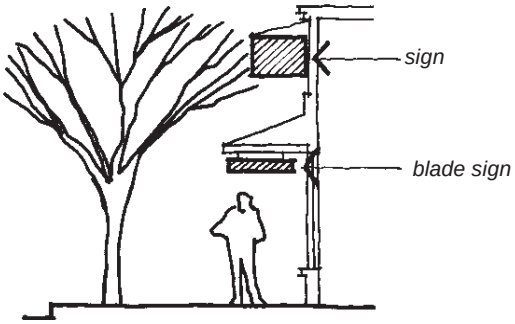
The details expressed by buildings at the street level influences how a pedestrian perceives an area. Appropriately scaled signage can provide visual interest and a human dimension to street-level building facades. Consider the following:

- Signage should be designed as an integral part of the building facade.
- Use signage to help distinguish the ground level of a building from the upper levels of a building.
- Creativity and individual expression in the design and placement of signs is encouraged.
- Establishing a rhythm along the street-level façade through continuity and spacing of signs helps to create a human scale.
- Use creative lighting to accent signs and assure their legibility at night.

Blade signs placed underneath overhead weather protection allow greater visibility and provide visual variety.

Unique signs add interest to the street front.





Illuminate distinctive building features such as signage.

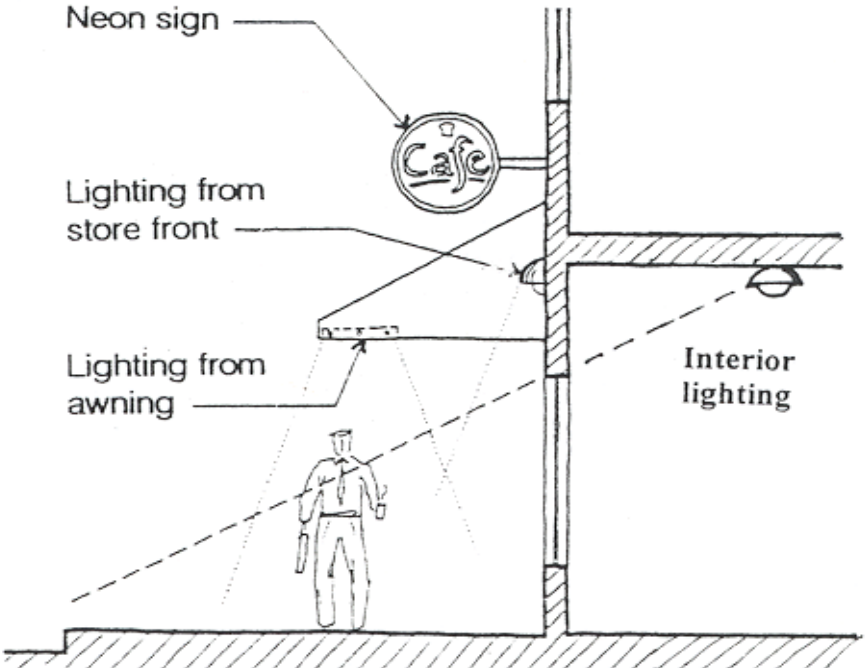
D-10 Commercial Lighting

Appropriate levels of lighting should be provided in order to promote visual interest and a sense of security for people in commercial districts during evening hours. Lighting may be provided by incorporation into the building façade, the underside of overhead weather protection, on and around street furniture, in merchandising display windows, in landscaped areas, and/or on signage.

Consider employing one or more of the following lighting strategies as appropriate:

- Illuminate distinctive features of the building, including entries, signage, canopies, and areas of architectural detail and interest.
- Install lighting in display windows that spills onto and illuminates the sidewalk.
- Orient outside lighting to minimize glare within the public right-of-way or in adjacent property.

Well-designed illumination creates a distinctive and secure entry.



Soft, yet secure sidewalk illuminaction can be created from multiple sources.

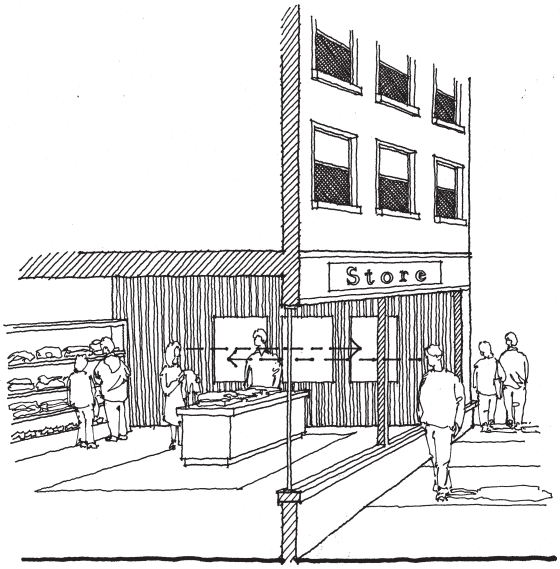
D-11 Commercial Transparency

Commercial storefronts should be transparent, allowing for a direct visual connection between pedestrians on the sidewalk and the activities occurring on the interior of a building. Blank walls should be avoided.

Explanation and Examples

Transparency at the street level enlivens the street environment, providing visual interest along the sidewalk and at night providing a secondary, more intimate, source of lighting. The following are examples of desirable design treatments that should be encouraged:

- windows that are sized and located to allow the most visibility into the interior spaces
- low-reflective glass
- limited use of appropriate display cases in place of windows
- windows that do not allow views of an interior wall or equipment



Storefront transparency allows for a visual connection between interior activities and people on the sidewalk.

Transparency allows store light to "spill" out onto the sidewalk at night, creating a second, more intimate source of lighting and a more vibrant street front.

Impeding window transparency disconnects building use from the street, deadening the pedestrian environment and may be a code violation.

D-12 Residential Entries and Transitions

For residential projects in commercial zones, the space between the residential entry and the sidewalk should provide security and privacy for residents and a visually interesting street front for pedestrians. Residential buildings should enhance the character of the streetscape with small gardens, stoops and other elements that work to create a transition between the public sidewalk and private entry.

1. Townhouse/Rowhouse

Explanation and Examples

Buildings with individual unit entries require special considerations such as:

- entrances with stoops are preferred because they provide semi-public/semi-private spaces, encourage activity in front of units, and reduce visibility into residential units;
- providing transitional spaces such as portals or arcades;
- paving of on-site walkways or entryways that is distinctive in color, pattern or texture; and
- providing "surrounds" around entry doors using color, texture and material variation creates visual distinction for residential entries.

Entries that are setback and incoporate landscaping help to establish a semi-private transitional space between a residential entry and the public sidewalk.

Unimposing gates help to define a private residential entry while maintaining visual connection with the street.

Portal entries establish semi-private spaces and provide shelter.

Stoops provide a transitional space between semi-public and semi-private space and grade differentiation reduces visibility into residential units.

Distinctive paving helps to define residential entries.

Courtyard entries provide a transition zone.

2. Multi-Family/Mixed-Use

Explanation and Examples

Main entrances of multi-family/mixed-use buildings should be located on the "primary pedestrian corridor" within commercial areas and should be clearly identifiable. Entries should be inviting to pedestrians while also providing adequate transition between public and private space. Consider the following:

- Recessed or courtyard entries provide a transition between private and public spaces and open space along the street front.
- Stooped entries or "grand stairways" set residential entrances apart from the sidewalk, create visual interest, and can provide informal seating and meeting spaces.
- Contrasting trim or "surrounds," lighting, differentiated overhead weather protection and/or grand canopies can create distinctive entries and provide comfortable transition zones for pedestrians.
- Accented paving helps to call out a residential entry and adds interest to the sidewalk.
- Entrances to residential uses within mixed use buildings should be distinctive so that they stand out from adjacent commercial uses.
- A change in glazing materials helps to differentiate between and residential and commercial uses.
- Distinctive signage for residential entries or addresses helps to define residential uses and facilitates wayfinding.

An entry "surround" and accented paving help to call out a residential entry and adds visual interest.

A residential entry should be distinguishable from adjacent commercial uses.

This distinctive weather canopy defines an entry and provides cover.

Incorporating a variation in color, material or texture adds visual distinction to a residential entry.