

Neighborhood Character:

Building Frontages in Mixed Use Commercial Districts

An important question for the future of the West Seattle Triangle area is: *Over time, how can we retain what is best about this unique area, while also fostering a neighborhood character that serves area businesses, residents, property owners and the West Seattle community as a whole?*

Future zoning can help direct how new buildings relate to the surrounding neighborhood and create a more cohesive sense of the neighborhood's character over time.

Zoning in the Triangle

Zoning in the Triangle planning area is currently a mix of residential zones, a general commercial zone (C1) and a Neighborhood Commercial zone (NC3). The Triangle planning project is exploring the possibility of rezoning a portion of the planning area from C1 to NC3. A map of existing zoning is found on the last page of this document.

Description of Terms

"C" means the "general Commercial" zone designation.

"NC" refers to the "Neighborhood Commercial" zone designation.

Comparing the NC and C Zones

Both the C1 and NC3 zones are "commercial" zones, allowing the same heights, densities, and parking requirements

Both zones allow commercial *and* residential uses, and contain the same provisions for mixed use development.

The C1 and NC3 zones allow similar uses. All existing commercial uses currently in the Triangle could continue and could expand in either zone, except that new "food processing" uses and drive-in lanes would be more limited under NC zoning.

The key difference between the two zones is that the NC zone contains provisions that require buildings to be oriented toward a more pedestrian-friendly streetscape environment.

Many neighborhoods with C (C1) zoning have seen development that is inconsistent with neighborhood plans, or with the scale and character of the surrounding business district.

The following pages compare development standards that address building frontages in the NC and C zones.



Blank Walls/Facades (facing street)



Description	Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Blank facades occur where walls do not have at least one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Windows ● Entryways or doors ● Stairs, stoops or porticos ● Decks or balconies ● Screening or landscaping on the façade ● Allowed in C zones ● Not allowed in NC zones 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Maximizes internal wall surface ● High level of privacy/secrecy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sidewalk and public right-of-way do not feel safe/secure ● Multiple blank walls along street makes block and neighborhood unattractive ● Natural lighting of building and views onto street and sidewalk reduced ● Gives building a fortress-like appearance

Transparent Facades (facing street)



Description	Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transparency occurs where walls at the street level have features that add interest and encourage street-level activity such as:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Windows○ Entryways or doors• Required in NC zones generally	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enhances feeling of safety and security by providing “eyes on the street”• Makes business more accessible to pedestrians• Improves natural lighting of building• Gives building façade a distinguishable identity and visual interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Creates challenges for design of building walls fronting steep grades

Building façade located on or near sidewalk



Description	Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building façade within 10' of street lot line unless wider sidewalks, plazas or other open space is provided • Works best with transparent facades • Required in NC zones generally • Parking discouraged from being in front of building 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More efficient use of building space – more business activity in smaller amount of space can accommodate small businesses. • Businesses highly visible and accessible from sidewalk • Safer for pedestrians - more “eyes on street” and fewer cars crossing sidewalk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No off-street parking (surface parking lots) in front of businesses

Drive-in Businesses



Description	Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes gas stations, fast food restaurants and other drive-in businesses • Prohibited in pedestrian-designated zones • Allowed in C zones with few conditions • Limited in NC zones 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy and quick auto access to businesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curb cuts and lanes interrupt the sidewalk • Cars crossing sidewalk could be a hazard for pedestrians especially elderly, children and disabled individuals. • Does not contribute much to a pedestrian oriented business district

Off-street Parking: *in front*



Description	Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Off-street parking for vehicles is located between building and sidewalk• Allowed in C zones• Discouraged in NC zones	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Short distance from parked car to business	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Makes the right of way appear wider than it actually is and pedestrian environment is less attractive• Business set back from sidewalk – less visible and accessible to pedestrians• Large parking areas make it difficult for customers to walk between businesses

Off-street Parking: *below, behind or beside*

Below



Behind



Beside



Description	Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In NC zones parking is encouraged to be located behind, beside or below structures • Parking is generally accessed from the alley if possible, or from a more auto-oriented street 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safer for pedestrians -- fewer cars crossing the sidewalk • Customers able to park in one location and then walk between businesses with ease. • More street front space can be devoted to business activity • Accommodates a wide range of commercial business types and formats • Creates a consistent neighborhood street front character when implemented over time through new projects mixed with existing buildings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New parking habits change over time • Way-finding needed to direct drivers to parking areas

Pedestrian Designated Zones



Description	Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Street level uses limited to pedestrian-oriented uses such as retail, entertainment, and restaurants • Drive-in or drive-through businesses prohibited • In zones with a “P” designation only 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enables variety of pedestrian uses on sidewalk • Increases safety for pedestrians • Encourages intensely pedestrian-oriented retail shopping area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designation alone does not guarantee attractive environment • Not appropriate where a broader mix of commercial businesses are encouraged

Existing Zoning West Seattle Triangle and Junction

