



CITY LIFE
AT STREET LEVEL

1406

1404

vetri

LAQUE
WORTS - HERRINGBONNERS - WORTLA

PLEASE
ORDER
AT THE
WINDOW



We actively recognize that we are on Indigenous land, the current and ancestral homelands of the Central Coast Salish people.



City of Seattle
OCTOBER 2019

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Methods + Measures	4
Case Studies	10
Key Lessons	11
How To Get There	34
Acknowledgements + References	37

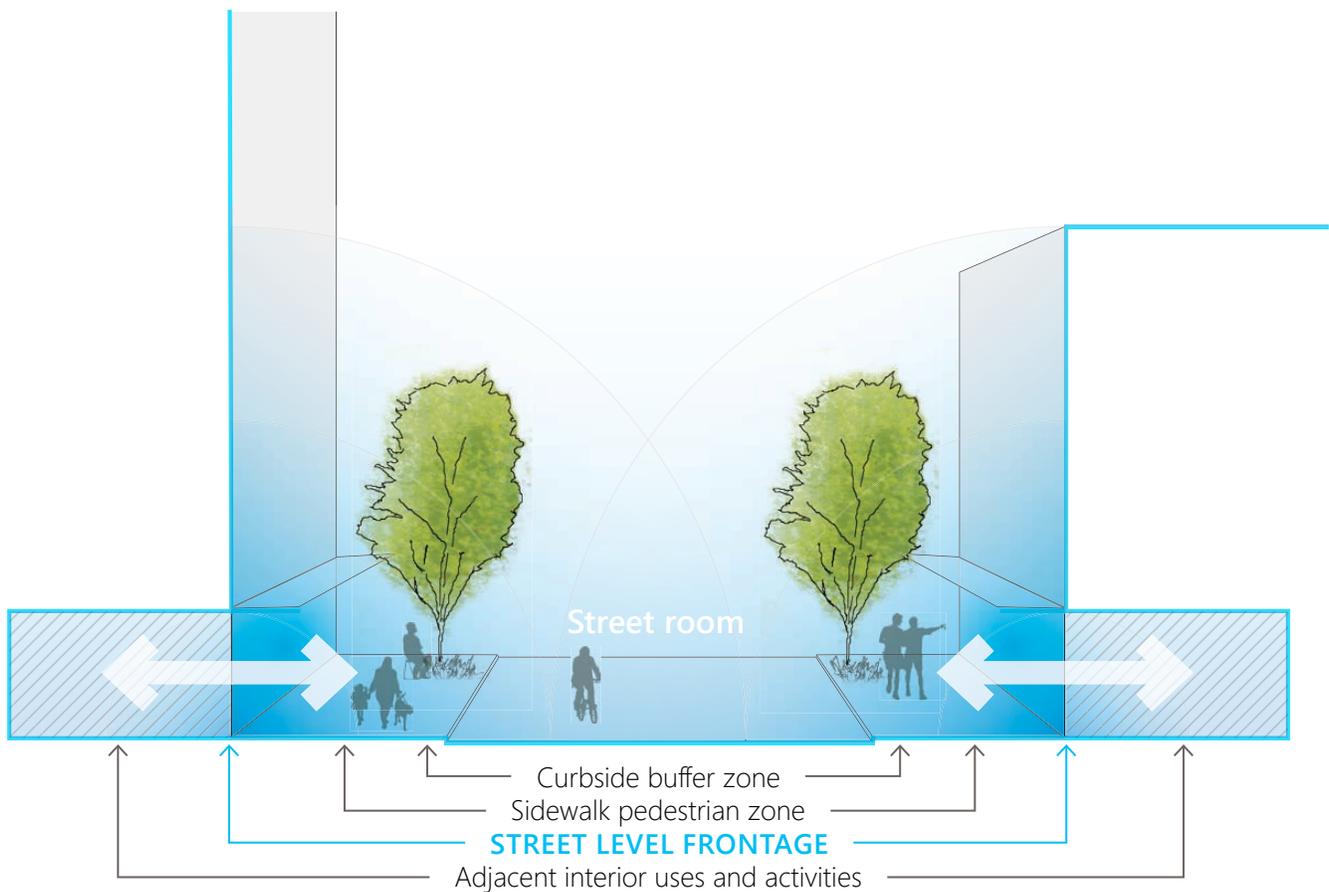
Executive Summary

An active street life — both day and night — is a defining feature of the city and important for livability, vitality and character.

As our city continues to grow and develop, **continued design focus is needed** on the street level frontages—where the building meets the sidewalk—to build and create new places to meet, interact and pause. Street level design is essential for a safe and vibrant public realm.

The **Seattle Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD)** helps create places for all Seattleites to enjoy by developing design guidelines and code standards. In spring of 2019, we researched and assessed selected street level frontages in Greater Downtown to better understand which design qualities encourage interaction and identify opportunities for improvement. We found **some qualities are universal** no matter the scale of the building or the uses inside: clear glass, welcoming entrances, canopies, lighting and detailing for pedestrian scale. Other qualities are more dependent on the activities inside and how they engage with the sidewalk.

This document builds on extensive research and best practices from other cities. It has an overview of our analysis of **case studies** and provides **key lessons** and opportunities for improvement specific to Seattle. This informs recommendations we offer for enhanced policy, code and design guidelines that would further encourage city life in any type of project. Even small steps have a large impact on city life.



The street level of buildings is a critical part of the public realm, offering a place to travel, eat out, exercise, shop and meet others.

Think of the last time you walked around Seattle and what made it memorable—besides the food. Which streets did you choose to walk along? What types of ground floor spaces along the sidewalk were you drawn to? Where did you choose to stop?

We began this work with the question of what makes a ground-level space more inviting. We reviewed recent studies and research on the subject (see References). Then we examined streetscapes and building case studies in Seattle's Greater Downtown. By documenting and comparing case study examples we noticed [reoccurring lessons](#). While some of these lessons are less easy to measure (and regulate), we thought they were important to describe and include to help explain the qualities that invite city life.

Many people impact street level design. Our hope is that this document will serve as [a resource for everyone](#)—building owners and tenants, architects and designers, general public and agencies—to serve as a guide for our collective work in shaping the city we all love.

Who this is for and how to use this document

Building Owners and Tenants undertaking new projects, remodels or tenant improvements can learn how to host activities and uses that enliven the street.

Architects and Designers can use this report as a tool to design building edges that encourage city life. This document explains why some projects are more successful than others.

General Public and Agencies can learn to evaluate the sidewalks zone and lead others to take action.

"We believe in treating every single public space—every building, every street, and every corner of the city—as an extension of our homes by turning our cities into living rooms for everyone."

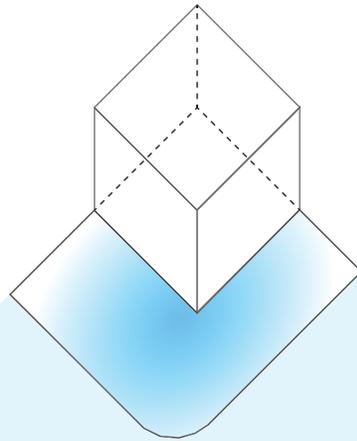
- Cobe Architects

Our streets make up the largest part of the public realm. In Greater Downtown 40% of land is Seattle's right of way, used for streets, alleys and sidewalks. As we continue to grow, how will we use our streets and sidewalks as places for people of all ages, abilities and cultures?

The street level of buildings is a critical consideration—the physical form and design cues affect how people move, feel, and engage. Many factors affect city life and the activity of pedestrians at a given place and time. Building off the work of Jane Jacobs, William Whyte, Jan Gehl and other key observers, researchers and documenters of public space and life, we grouped street level design features into five categories; **welcome** public life, **invite** a mix of active uses, **connect** visually + physically, **reinforce** building entries, and **enhance** human scale.

Note about pictures

The presence of people signify city life. Many of the pictures in this document were intentionally taken with fewer people to focus on the building features described. Photos not individually credited are taken during the spring of 2019 by city staff.



WELCOME
PUBLIC LIFE



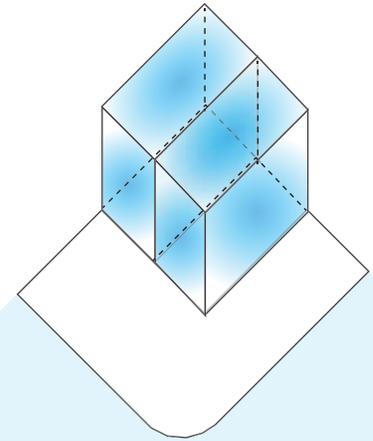
Informal movable seating makes a place attractive to everyone and can shift to meet changing needs.



Street furniture and space for sidewalk vending, seating, and restaurant dining invite public use.



Solid walls create barriers to use and disconnect from the sidewalk.



INVITE
A MIX OF ACTIVE USES



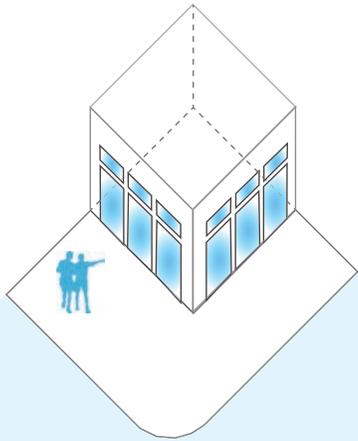
When spaces vary in size and use, they support a stimulating street experience.



Where interior space is limited, micro retail can support activation.



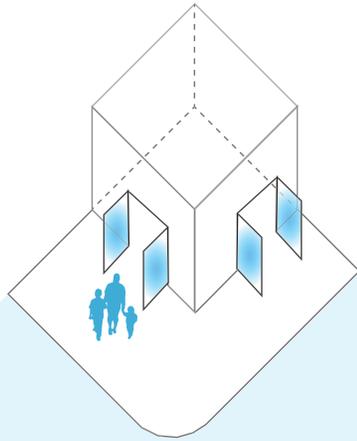
Key visible locations (like the corner) should contain lively uses past 5 pm.



CONNECT
VISUALLY + PHYSICALLY



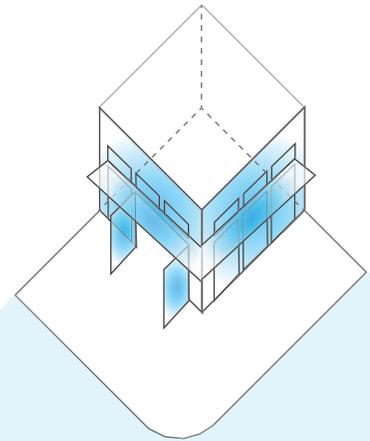
Open, porous connections between the sidewalk and interior spaces draw people in.



REINFORCE
BUILDING ENTRIES



When entries are obvious and distinctive they help draw people in.



ENHANCE
HUMAN SCALE



At eye level, forms, textures and patterns with vertical intervals along the facade, keep pedestrians engaged.



Large, clear windows engage passersby.



Stepped floorplates fully integrate access for all abilities.



Careful detailing, elements and planters create human scale.



Large blank walls, even if detailed, are imposing and deaden the street.



Raised entries create a visual barrier and limit accessibility from the sidewalk.



Repetitive elements or flush glass without interruptions create a long monotonous expanse.



5 MEASURES

examined through

10 CASE STUDIES

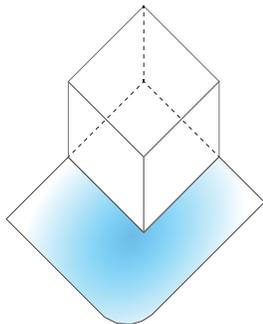
identified

14 KEY LESSONS

Many City policies and departments recognize that [streets and sidewalks full of social and commercial activity](#) have the power to improve the city's health, safety, vibrancy and happiness. To better understand what makes a successful public space, the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) is collecting data on the number of people using public spaces and the types of activities they are engaged in—referred to as a Public Life Study.

As a companion to the SDOT work, this *City Life at Street Level* study focuses on street level frontages and how they interface with the sidewalk, to identify the design qualities that encourage thriving city life.

The next few pages describe how each performance category was measured: [welcome](#) public life, [invite](#) a mix of active uses, [connect](#) visually + physically, [reinforce](#) building edges, and [enhance](#) human scale.



WELCOME PUBLIC LIFE

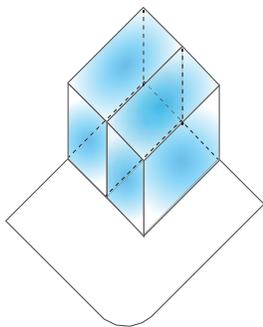
Seattle is a 'street wall' city; the code ensures a consistent street definition, so pedestrians have interesting storefronts along their path. Setbacks, courtyards and other erosions of the street wall are tightly limited.

For our study we measured:

- Is any wall space on private property designed to energize the adjacent sidewalk?
- How much open/spillover space is provided with setbacks on private property?
- Are there place-making elements such as seating, landscaping and art in the sidewalk and curbside zones?

"The quality and detailing of ground floor frontages have a high impact on the public realm. Frontages comprised of many small units, welcoming awnings, frequent openings, and a variety of functions make the public realm more diverse, stimulating and attractive. The important thing is to allow people the opportunity to connect."

-Gehl Architects



INVITE A MIX OF ACTIVE USES

Uses drive the liveliness of streets; different uses generate different types of pedestrian activity. In an effort to delineate ground-level uses, we grouped indoor functions into three types, **active (people centered)**, **mixed (viewing focused)** and limited (controlled access).

For each case study we documented indoor functions, entrances, and adjacent street types (see typical plan diagram on the right).



Active (People Centered)

- Restaurants (visible places for eating, drinking, socializing)
- Arts, creative spaces, bookstores and other maker activities
- Open lounge for music/theatre/museum
- Multi-use community rooms
- Transit entrances



Mixed (Viewing Focused)

- Retail sales and services (encourage walking in)
- Produce, flowers and other merchandise
- Galleries (which provide engaging displays during day and night)
- Visible craftwork and food prep (bakery, tailor, etc.)



Limited (Controlled Access)

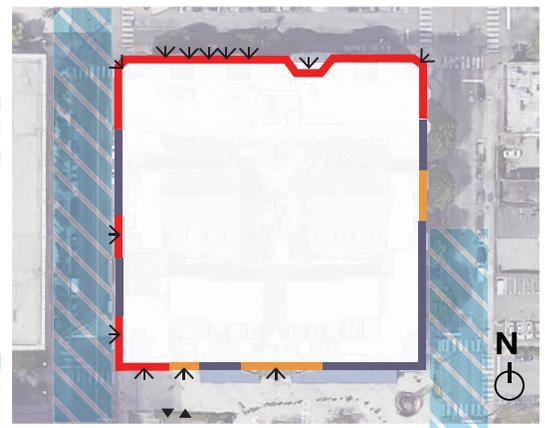
- Offices, hotels and institutions (tend to be more introverted and offer little activation)
- Residential lobbies
- Live/work units (typically not lively throughout the day)
- Landscaped setbacks

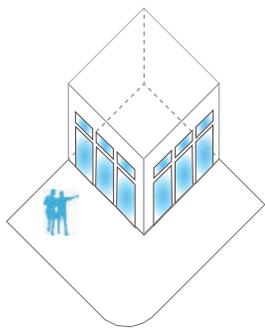
We also measured:

- What is the amount and size of the different ground-level uses?
- Are the uses inside open past 5 pm?

Legend for case studies

- Uses**
- Active █
 - Mixed █
 - Limited/Inactive █
- Entries**
- Pedestrian ➤
 - Vehicular ▶
- Type of Street**
- Pedestrian Class I or II ▨
 - Green Street ▨

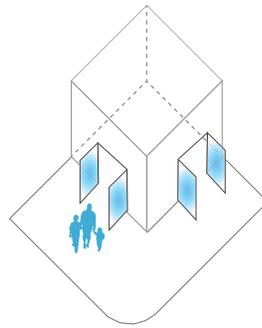




CONNECT VISUALLY + PHYSICALLY

In Seattle, there are areas where we require a certain amount of [ground-level transparency to improve safety and interaction](#). In these locations transparency is measured in an area between 2 and 8 feet above the sidewalk.

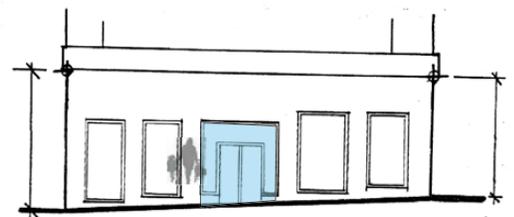
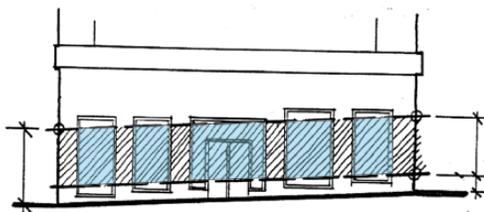
For each case study we calculated the percentage of transparency provided, and where a certain amount is required, we note it.

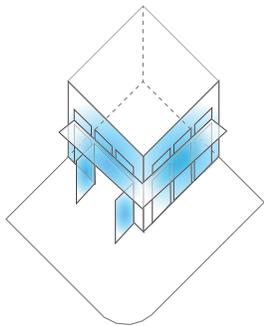


REINFORCE BUILDING ENTRIES

While not required in Seattle, some cities regulate and require entrances every 20–30 feet to provide [porous, interesting walks which enhance urban life](#).

To better understand the typical practice in Seattle, we measured the average door spacing at commercial sections for each case study.

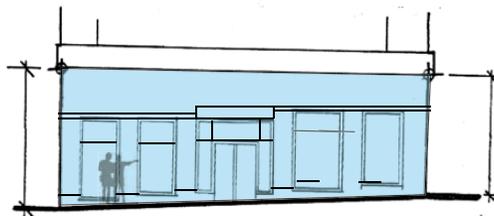




ENHANCE HUMAN SCALE

A large part of human scale is determined by the height of the ground-level and how **materials and details engage pedestrians.**

To focus on what the pedestrian experiences, we measured the height from the sidewalk to the second floor line. This is a different approach to measurement than the Code requires in SMC 23.86.023. In certain cases, the Code allows counting below grade portions of the facade on sloped streets.



"Great streets require physical characteristics that help the eyes do what they want to do, must do: move. Complex building facades over which light can pass or change make for better streets than do more simple ones."

-Allan B. Jacobs

CASE STUDIES

We focused on ten case studies to better understand how different types of ground levels work and how they were shaped by codes, incentives and requirements. These examples were selected for their range of scale, location in the downtown area and urban design, including many past Design Review People's Choice Urban Design Awards winners.



A Expo



B Apollo



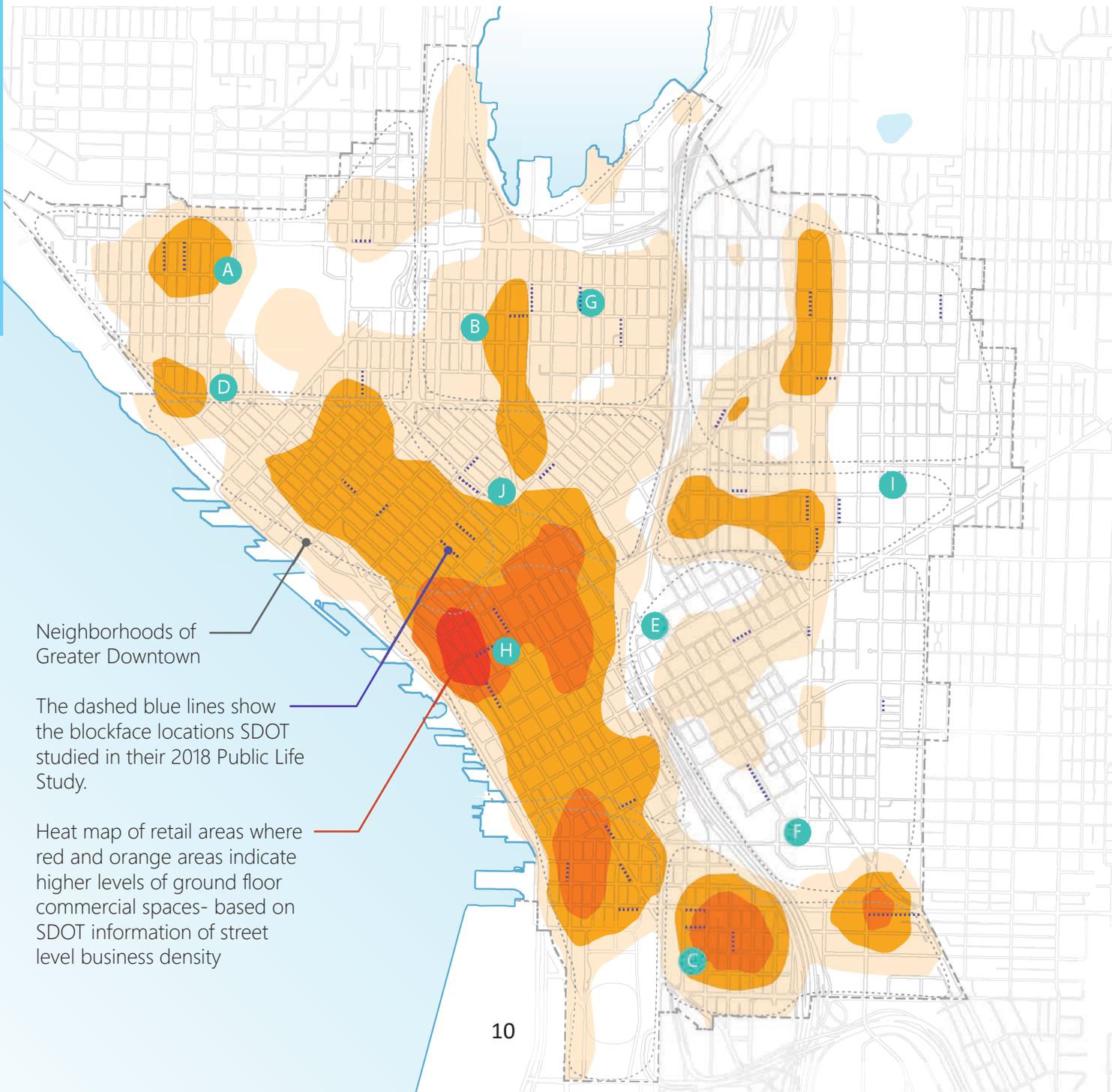
C Uwajimaya



D Clarendon



E Cielo



Neighborhoods of Greater Downtown

The dashed blue lines show the blockface locations SDOT studied in their 2018 Public Life Study.

Heat map of retail areas where red and orange areas indicate higher levels of ground floor commercial spaces- based on SDOT information of street level business density



F Batik



G 400 Fairview



H West Edge



I 12th Avenue Arts



J Doppler

Relationship to the Seattle Design Guidelines

This study offers design techniques and lessons which are consistent with the [Seattle Design Guidelines](#) for private development, as well as more images and information from recent case studies that illustrate the intent and desired outcomes.

As identified in the adopted citywide [Seattle Design Guidelines](#), the street level design should reinforce the positive characteristics of the surrounding context. Among others, all qualifying projects are subject to the [Context/Site guideline](#): “Strengthen the most desirable forms, characteristics and patterns of the streets, block faces...in the surrounding area.” Projects should assess the uses, movement and design patterns of the adjacent and nearby properties, and design a context-based response for the street level, rather than a purely internal or use-driven approach.

If the existing context is not yet pedestrian rich, projects should not ‘give up’ but rather help establish a precedent for a better street-level, as referenced in the [Public Life guideline](#): “Encourage human interaction and activity at the street level with clear connections to building entries and edges.”

14 KEY LESSONS

While researching case study examples we noticed reoccurring lessons. Some are easy to measure; others are less so. In an effort to explain qualities that invite city life we thought both types are important to describe. Here are our top 14:

	pg
① Storefronts should be designed for variety	12
② Not all glass is clear.	14
③ Inside activities invite people.	16
④ Corners are meeting places	18
⑤ Entries and floors should step with slopes	20
⑥ Vertical rhythms create pedestrian scale	22
⑦ Details ensure visual interest	24
⑧ Light, clear canopies work in the Northwest	26
⑨ Lighting adds safety and invites nightlife	28
⑩ Spillover draws people in	30
⑪ Infill over time	32
⑫ Micro retail is an incubator	32
⑬ No barriers are needed!	33
⑭ Active arcades are fine	33

KEY LESSON #1

Storefronts should be designed for variety

Storefronts play a critical role in creating an active atmosphere and signaling walkability. Fine-grained storefronts, punctuated with multiple doors and individualized storefronts, are especially tied to walkability and thriving activity.



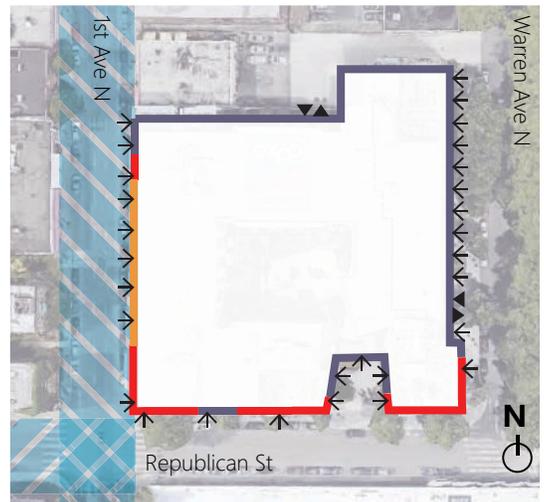
Individual shops express their identity with color, art and signage.



These diverse storefronts are typically done by individual businesses.



Distinctive canopies, doors, signs and materials create legible, individual identities for merchants.

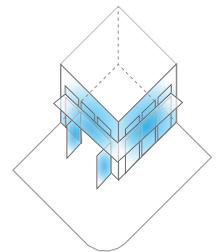
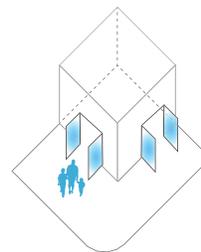
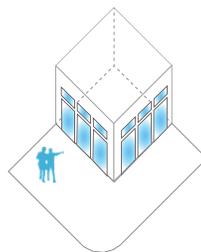
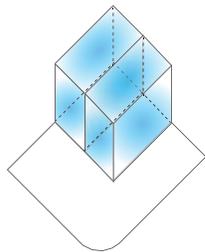
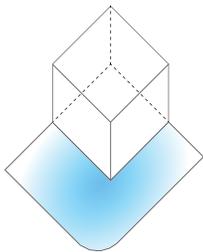


CASE STUDY A

EXPO

100 Republican Street

It may look like the different storefronts were personalized by tenants since they vary so much from each other, but they were designed early on, during the design of the building, approved and built as part of the initial development.



2,080 sf

of plaza (accessible to the public) along Republican, includes 3 areas of sidewalk patio spillover and placemaking art features

10

different commercial spaces, ranging in size from 1,000 to 2,550 sf. All are open past 5 pm

85%

transparency between 2-8 ft. along 1st Ave. (60% is required)

23.5 ft

average door spacing at commercial section along 1st Ave

12-17 ft

ground floor height (13 ft is required by code). A code departure was approved for 3 commercial units to be less than the required minimum height

KEY LESSON #2

Not all glass is clear

It is desirable to be able to see out of buildings and into them, so that the activities inside and outside are connected visually and can enrich and inspire each other.

Not all glass is made the same—its actual composition can be altered to be more clear or more opaque. Low-iron glass is recommended at the ground-level for its transparent clarity.

Glass does not activate the sidewalk if covered with signs, shelving, equipment or obscuring films, tints or shades. Limited amounts of patterned glass can provide interest, but only if they are outside pedestrian eye-level and are over 50% transparent. Applied films are discouraged; typically they are too opaque, reflective and/or obscuring.



Large clear panes of glass make it easy to see and connect with the inside.



Some glass types or films are very reflective and make it hard to see inside.



CASE STUDY B

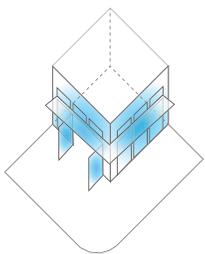
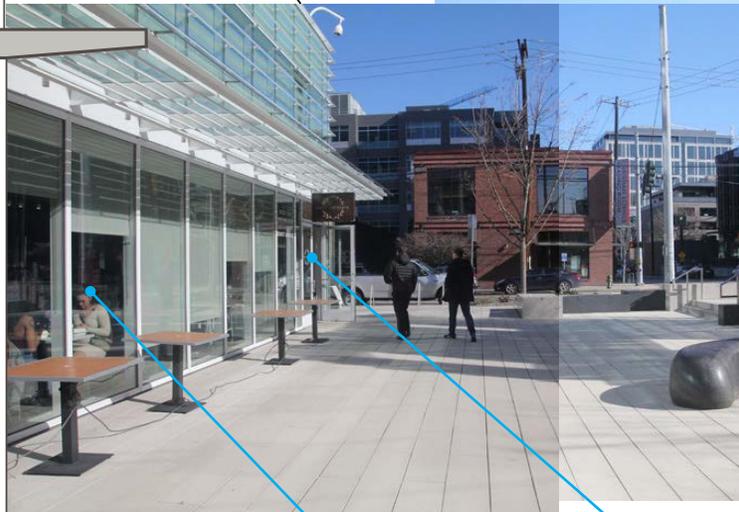
Apollo

325 9th Ave N

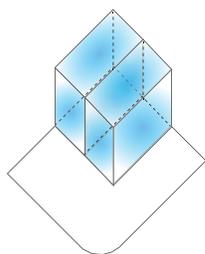
The half-block office project integrates street-activating commercial at the two corners and a transparent, welcoming lobby at the mid-block. The southeast cafe storefront engages a corner plaza with seating, plants, art and a water feature. Due to the southern exposure, transparency is often comprised by blinds.

"Successful ground floor... projects prioritize increased light, openness, and street-level activation...and require resources dedicated to building open and high-finish spaces."

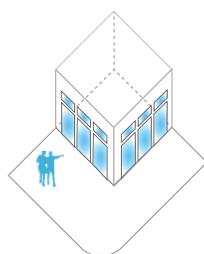
-Downtown Seattle Association



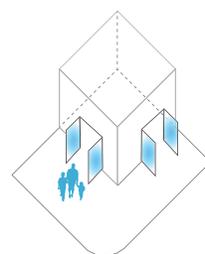
16-25 ft
ground floor height



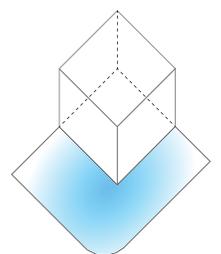
3
commercial spaces,
ranging in size from
1,200 to 2,825 sf.
One is open past 5
pm



91%
transparency
between 2-8 ft.
along Thomas
(60% is required)
93% provided
along 9th Ave
(30% is required)



41 ft
average door spacing
along Thomas and
Harrison



4,560 sf
of open space
plaza along Thomas
(required by code to
satisfy open space
requirement).
Two areas of sidewalk
cafe spillover and
placemaking art
features provided

KEY LESSON #3

Inside activities invite people

Simply having glass or art is not enough to attract visitors. Active, people-centered uses draw pedestrians and encourage interaction.



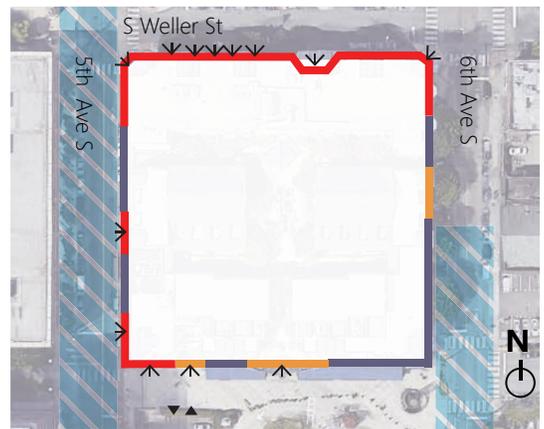
Food (and visible cheese making) invites passersby to stop and take a look.



Display windows can be designed to open views to the interior space beyond.



Glass or surface art alone is not enough as a replacement for active uses.



CASE STUDY

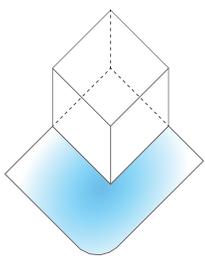
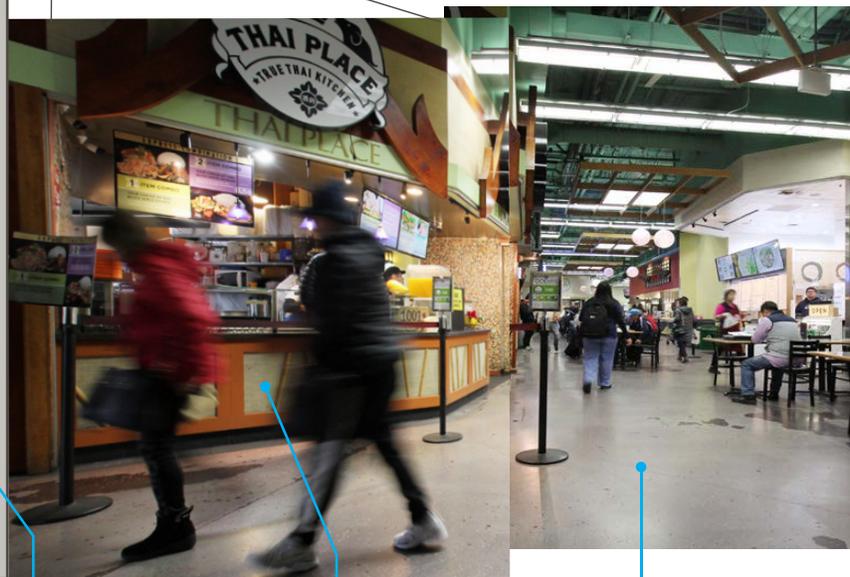
Uwajimaya

521 S Weller St

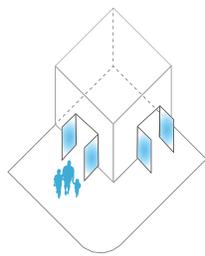
Almost the entire perimeter of this full-block mixed use project has transparent frontages and individual merchants. The large grocery store and its associated back-of-house needs are internalized. Diverse merchants and frequent storefronts respond to the fine grain Chinatown context.

"...a stranger feels at home because they can inhabit the city...by strolling through it without aim or purpose, stopping off at one or another café that lines the streets, and past which the life of the city—the flow of pedestrians—moves along."

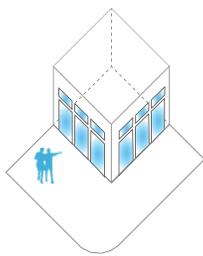
-Hannah Arendt



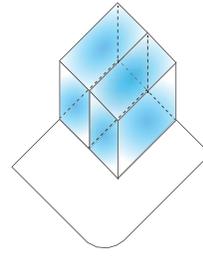
350 sf
ground level setback
area at entrances



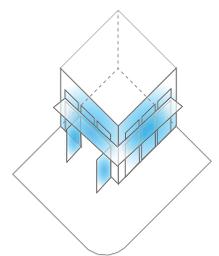
24 ft
average door
spacing along S
Weller St



70%
transparency
between 2-8 ft.
along S Weller St



21
commercial spaces,
ranging from 256 to
42,100 sf in size. All
are open past 5 pm



16-20 ft
ground floor to
floor height

KEY LESSON #4

Corners are meeting places

Street corners are places of convergence. When they function well they can lend a human scale at the street level, draw people and signify to pedestrians to slow down and stay.



Open and inviting corner entries engage with the sidewalk.



Seating at the corner welcomes people to use the space for gathering.



Inactive uses and armoring the corner hamper the activity of the street.



CASE STUDY D

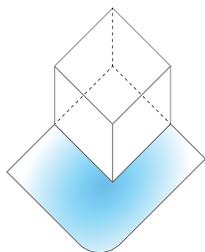
Clarendon

105 Warren Ave N

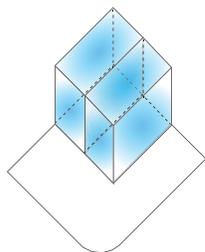
A residential project with one large commercial use along Denny. The residential lobby/lounge occupies a highly visible corner and while the interior space is well designed and highly transparent to any activities within—the use itself does not inspire city life and engagement as a commercial space would.

"If the ground floors are interesting and varied, the urban environment is inviting and enriching. If the ground floors are closed or lacking in detail, the urban experience is correspondingly flat and impersonal."

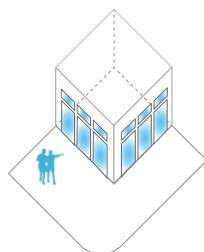
-Jan Gehl



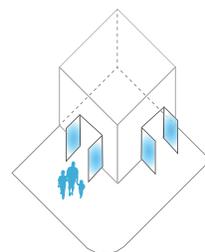
1,600 sf
of setback along Denny Way at the commercial portion and Warren Ave N at the live work spaces



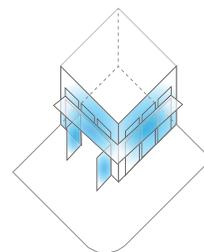
1
commercial space 2,450 sf, open past 5 pm.



78%
transparency between 2-8 ft. along Denny Way (60% is required)



58 ft
average door spacing at commercial section of the building along Denny Way



11-16 ft
ground floor height

KEY LESSON #5

Entries and floors should step with slopes

Direct entries allow unimpeded flow for pedestrians and goods and enrich the sidewalk experience.



We have steep streets; stepping perimeter floor slabs and storefronts affords consistent storefront activation and regular entrances for pedestrians.



A recessed entrance at midpoint of commercial spaces steps with grade.



A recessed entrance at corner and another 30 ft downslope. Planting screens the floor bulkhead.



CASE STUDY E

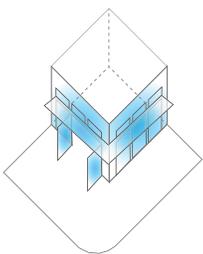
Cielo

800 Seneca St

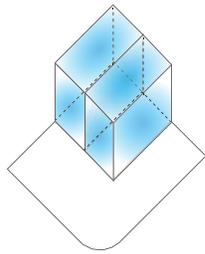
The residential tower has a corner commercial entrance, commercial which steps along the steep adjacent street, and a northwest ground floor that fronts a public promenade to Freeway Park. Private uses surround the park frontage, offering sporadic activation of the valuable public space adjacent.

"Entrances have valuable potential... their form determines whether entrance into the private sphere becomes a hurdle or a fluid transfer."

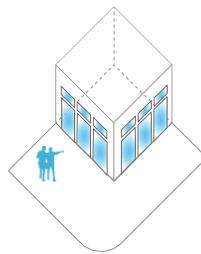
-Mikoleit and Pürckhauer



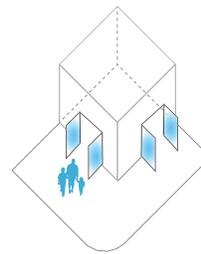
14 ft
ground floor height



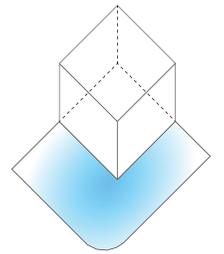
2
different commercial spaces, one 1,700 sf and the other 1,450 sf. Both are open after 5 pm.



71%
transparency between 2-8 ft.



33 ft
average door spacing at commercial section of the building



6,225 sf
ground-level plaza and promenade area

KEY LESSON #6

Vertical rhythms create pedestrian scale

Most buildings incorporate vertical elements or rhythms along the street level facade; purely horizontal elements create a long expanse without human scale. Modularity in window size, door size and materials can be designed in proportion with the human body to contribute to pedestrian scale.



Vertical pilasters, pattern of windows and doors all add a human scale.



A mix of ground-level uses and canopies differentiate each use—but the lack of contrast between each loses the sense of scale.



CASE STUDY F

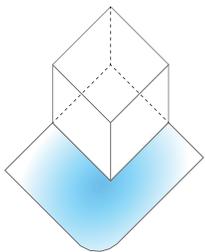
Batik

123 Broadway

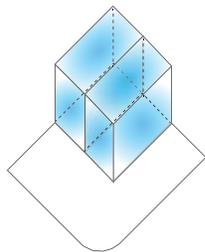
The residential project on a sloping site has well-placed commercial spaces facing south, onto a setback plaza and community park across the street. The remainder of the perimeter has ground-level residential units with patios that step with the grade; some front a pedestrian promenade connecting through the neighborhood.

"Walking along a ground floor facade with primarily vertical rhythms makes the walk much more interesting and eye-catching. We move from 'column to column,' which makes the walk seem shorter."

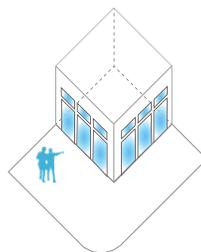
-Jan Gehl



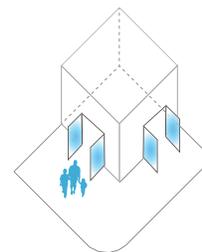
13,000 sf
ground-level setback area



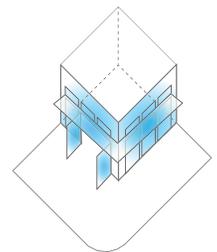
2
commercial spaces, one 1,036 sf and the other 1,027 sf. One is open past 5 pm.



88%
transparency between 2-8 ft. along Yesler Way at commercial section (50% is required)



23 ft
average door spacing at commercial section of the building



14 ft
ground floor to floor height

KEY LESSON #7

Details ensure visual interest

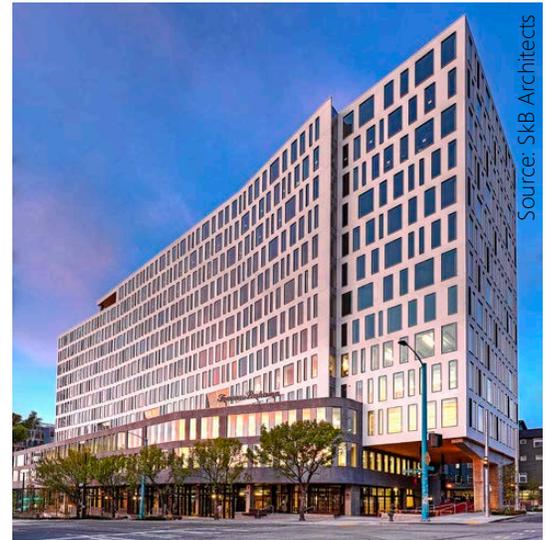
Fine grain detailing provides visual interest and stimulates the pedestrian to slow down and look inside. Tactile materials, depth and texture engage the eyes and provide human scale. Visual interest can be provided by carefully designed elements such as doors, canopies, lighting, signage, and mullion patterns. Materiality can also give pedestrians a tactile experience as various materials create different perceptions of weight and scale.



The addition of plants into the storefront design adds a layer of interest.



Entries are recessed and surrounded by material texture and light to create a visual accent and destination.



CASE STUDY

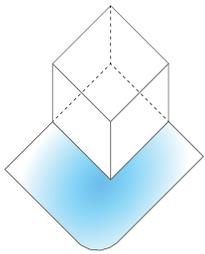
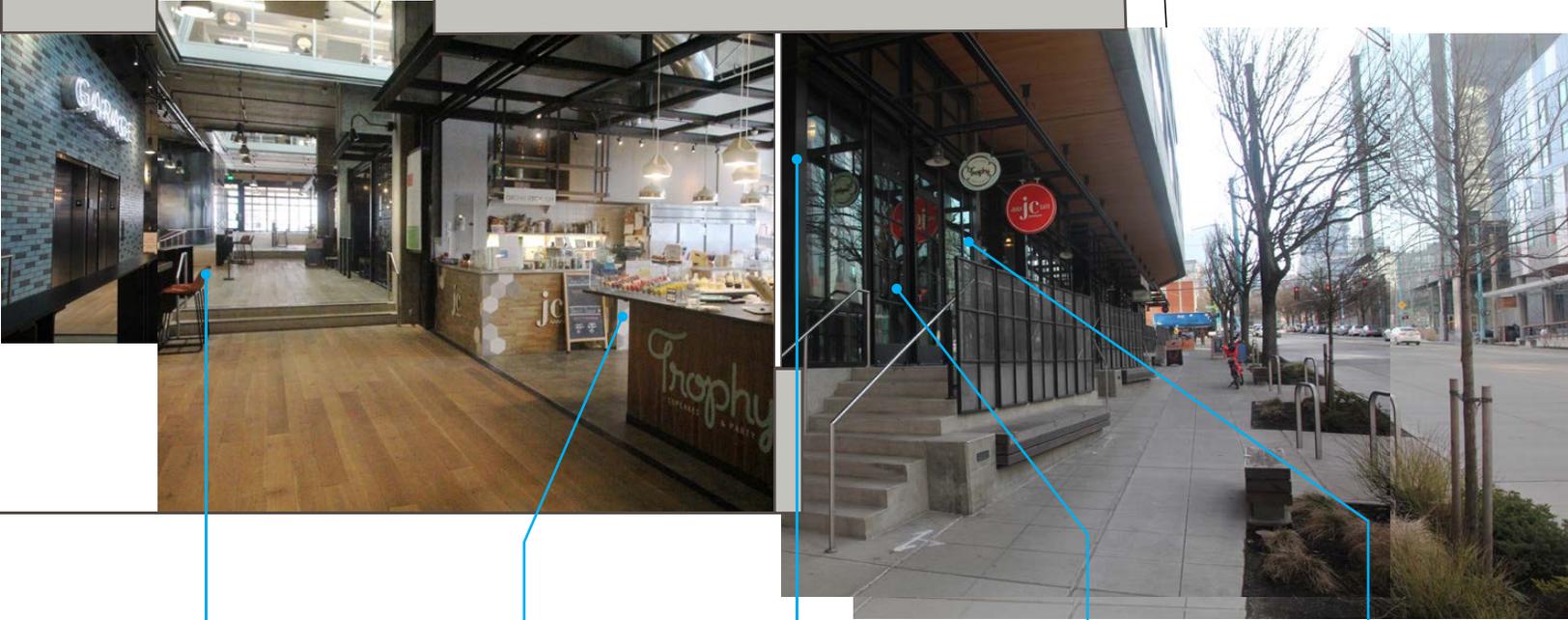
400 Fairview

400 Fairview Ave N.

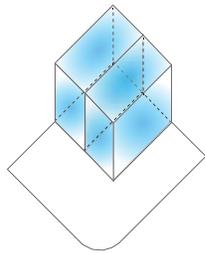
The half-block office project has a spatially rich ground floor, with an interior arcade. The 2 corner entries are recessed to activate the plazas and align with the sidewalks. The entire mid-block is occupied by commercial spaces, but they do not gradually step with the slope, so are difficult to reach from the street.

"The more doorways the better. The best streets are replete with entryways, as little as 12 ft apart."

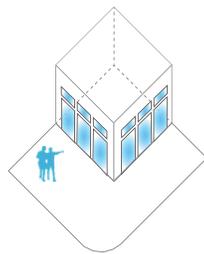
-Allan B. Jacobs



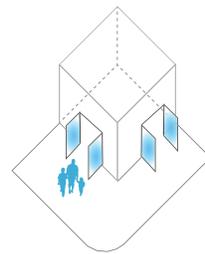
6,448 sf
ground floor open space provided.
(6,186 sf was required for the office use open space)



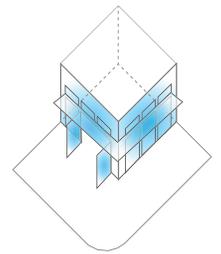
9
different commercial spaces in the market hall, ranging in size from 600 to 5,000 sf. Four are open past 5 pm.



16-30 ft
ground floor height of 13 ft required



78%
transparency between 2-8 ft.
(60% is required)



20 ft
average door spacing at commercial section

KEY LESSON #8

Light, clear canopies work in the Northwest

Continuous, well lit, overhead weather protection provides human scaled proportions and improves comfort along pedestrian routes.



Transparent canopies and light framing maintain a pleasant sidewalk environment with plenty of natural light.



Overly dark colors and opaque surfaces make canopies feel oppressive to pedestrians, especially during dark winters. Extra lighting is required to increase security after dark.

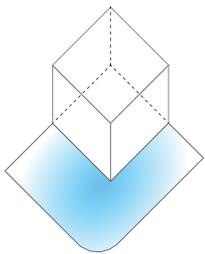


CASE STUDY H

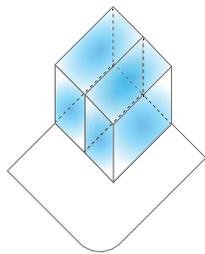
West Edge

1430 2nd Ave

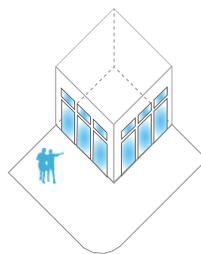
The residential tower has a largely commercial ground floor, with a residential lobby and vehicle entrance mid-block. The glass canopies are consistent and light, and step with the grade change. The lobby has a distinctive grill treatment, but the rest of the ground floor frontages are flush, with repetitive mullions, reflective glass and a tall concrete sill.



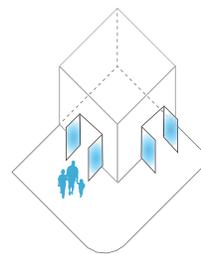
288 sf
of setbacks at entries



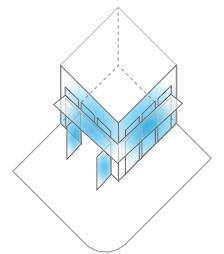
3
different commercial
spaces, ranging in
size from 550 to
2,800 sf. One open
past 5 pm.



74%
transparency
between 2-8 ft.
along 2nd Ave
(60% is required)



35 ft
average door spacing
at commercial section
of the building along
2nd Ave



16-25 ft
ground floor height

KEY LESSON #9

Lighting adds safety and invites nightlife

Pedestrians use streets all day and in all seasons. However street lighting is not always present or consistent. Buildings should provide sufficient and non-glare pedestrian scale lighting along sidewalks. Especially during short winter days, lighting is critical to invite nighttime vitality, and reassure pedestrians that walking is a viable and safe choice.

Creative and integrated lighting can also announce entrances, improve commercial visibility, and add to pedestrian scale and interest. Bold lighting schemes can identify civic landmarks and provide useful urban wayfinding, provided they are energy-efficient and sensitive about light spillover on adjacent uses.



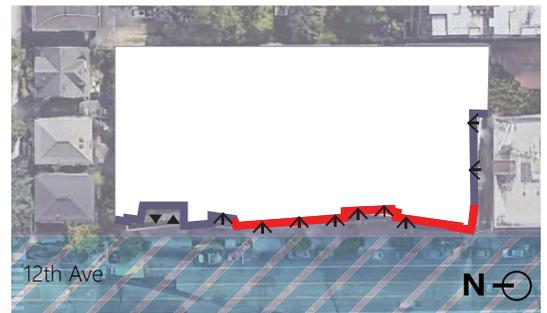
Bright signage or interior night lighting adds vitality but cannot be assumed over the building's life.



Building-mounted lighting improves pedestrian experience and safety, especially in winter seasons.



Source: SMR Architects



CASE STUDY 1

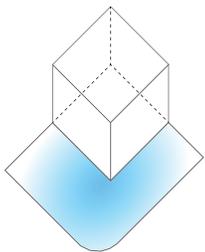
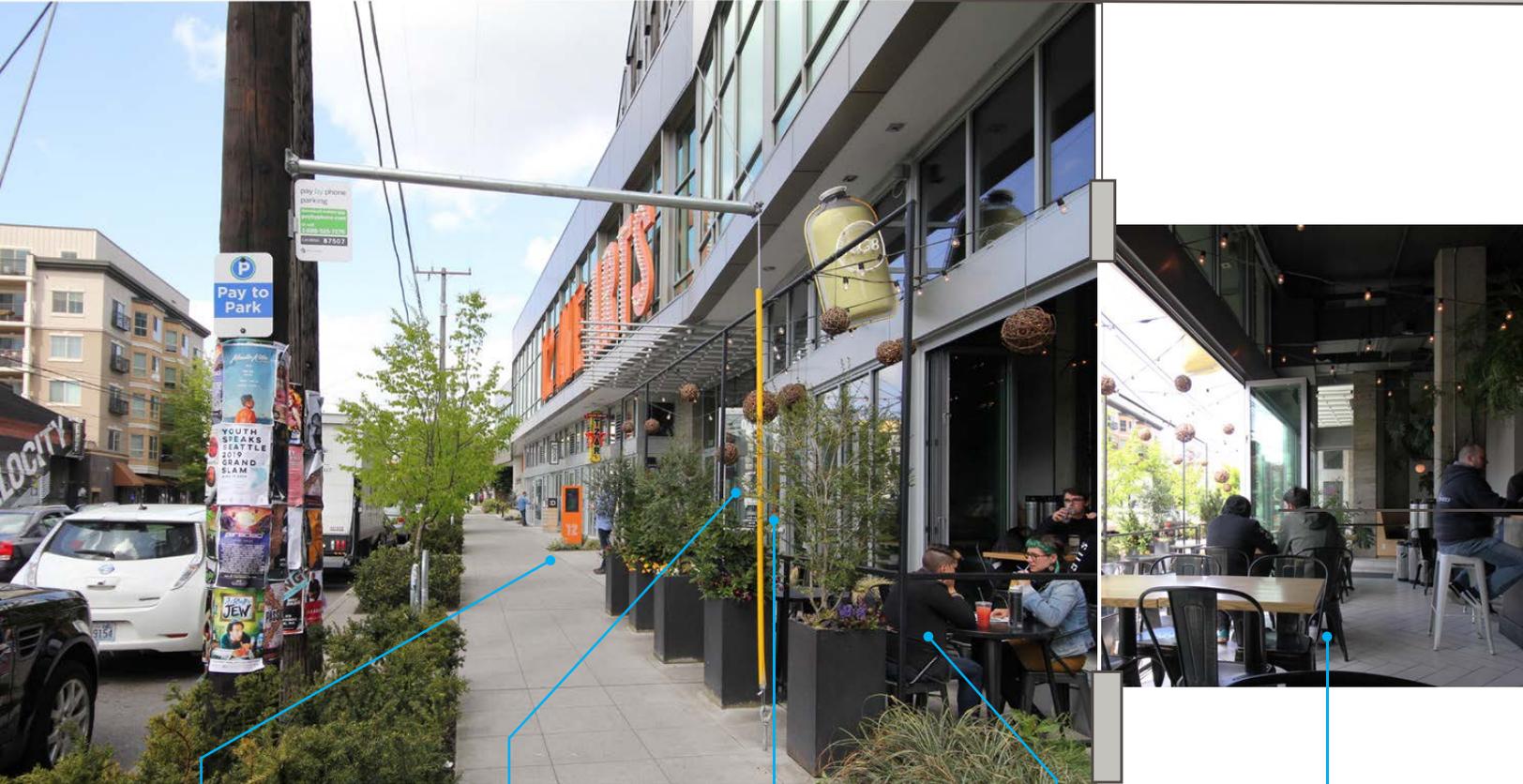
12th Avenue Arts

1620 12th Ave

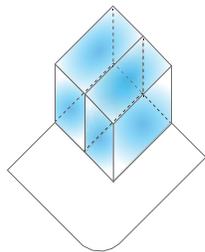
Ground floor entrances pull back from the sidewalk, creating outdoor gathering areas that open opportunities for commercial businesses to spillover to the exterior. Inspiration for the undulating second floor facade and sign comes from the brightly lit ornamental marquees found on early 20th century theaters.

"The number of evening activities and their location are important factors for the vitality of the city and the perception of safety."

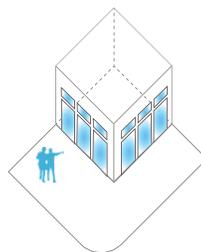
-Jan Gehl



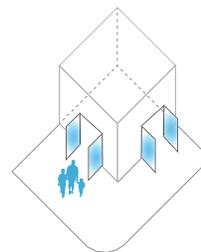
1,900 sf
ground-level setback area



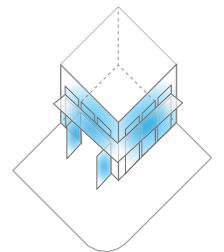
5
different active spaces, ranging in size from 1,050 to 8,900 sf. All are open past 5 pm



70%
transparency between 2-8 ft.



25 ft
average door spacing at commercial section of the building



17 ft
ground floor height

KEY LESSON #10

Spillover draws people in

Street level building design improves the pedestrian experience of adjacent sidewalks by inviting pedestrians into the merchants and services, and also “spilling out” onto the sidewalk. Cafe tables, merchandise racks, planters and other elements in the sidewalk add interest and human scale (provided they do not block pedestrian movement).



Modest spillover features animate a typical sidewalk



Operable windows, art and plantings activate a corner park with integrated seating for everyone—both pedestrians and paying customers.



Cafe tables at both the building edge and curbside (both are for paying customers in this example).



Source: NBBJ



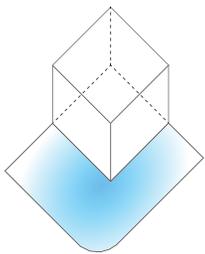
CASE STUDY J

Doppler 2021 7th Ave

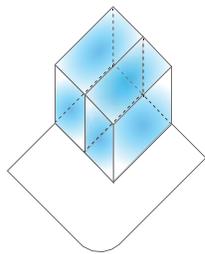
A full block office project with a mid-block pedestrian connection. All corners are occupied with commercial; each tenant has a distinct storefront treatment and identity. Mid-block office lobbies and parking entries interrupt the pedestrian experience. All streetscapes have planting, seating and art.

"What attracts people most, it would appear, is other people...they speak of getting away from it all, and use terms like "escape," "oasis," "retreat." What people do, however, reveals a different priority."

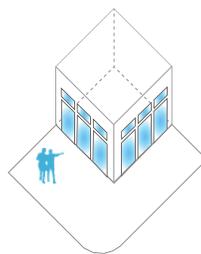
-William H. Whyte



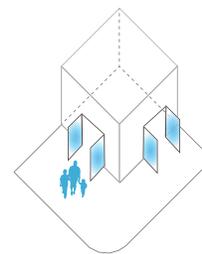
12,370 sf
of plaza



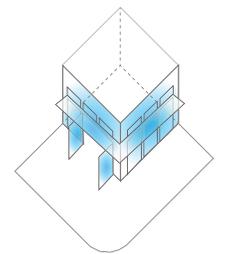
10
different commercial spaces, ranging in size from 800 to 3,425 sf. All are open past 5 pm



84%
transparency between 2-8 ft. along 6th Ave. (30% is required)



34 ft
average door spacing at commercial section of the building along 6th Ave



14-26 ft
ground floor height

KEY LESSON #11

Infill over time

Initial architecture can provide a permanent frame of bays or columns, which provides order for the variable storefronts infilled over time.



Tall infill storefronts with transom windows provide maximum flexibility and viability for tenants.



The stone bays of the base creates a strong frame for different infill treatments.



The infill between columns is unscreened parking which affords no pedestrian activation.

KEY LESSON #12

Micro retail is an incubator

Small commercial uses can occupy shallow, unusual street facades and incubate small businesses.



A 100 sf art gallery/studio and spillover!



Service and customer counters activate the facade.

KEY LESSON #13

No barriers are needed!

A recent rule change allows a fence-free design option for sidewalk cafés. SDOT sidewalk café permits now allow pavement markers instead of the standard 42" high barrier. This new option is intended to help restaurants integrate their sidewalk cafés with adjacent public space and improve customer movement in and around the café area.



A permanent fence restricts pedestrian movement half of the year when not used for café tables.



Pavement markers create a more fluid and friendly café zone.

KEY LESSON #14

Active arcades are fine; not all setbacks are good

Internalized public outdoor areas at the expense of an active street environment are discouraged.



An open to sky arcade invites pedestrians with activate uses.



A continuous setback with no activating use, becomes a liability and must be fenced off.

"In an important respect, public spaces that are inside differ from public spaces that are outside. They're not as public. The look of a building, its entrances, the guards do have a filtering effect and the cross section of the public that uses the space within is somewhat skewed... This, of course, is just what the building management and shop owners want. But there is a question of equity posed."

-William H. Whyte



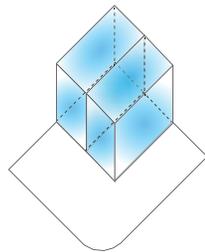
Code and Guideline Recommendations

We set out to identify gaps and potential [improvements for development standards in the Seattle Land Use Code and Design Guidelines](#).

Design Guidelines are advisory and provide the basis for Design Review. Code standards are required, unless 'departed' from for a superior design through the Design Review process.

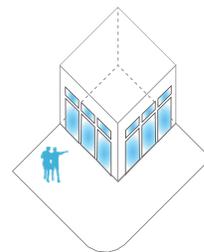
As more people move into Greater Downtown, the design and performance of all buildings is more critical than ever; many of the relevant Code provisions are over a decade old.

The following are specific recommendations for consideration, grouped by existing or new topics found in the Seattle Code or guidelines.



6.6

different ground-level commercial spaces average of case studies



78.9%

average transparency between 2'- 8'

EXISTING CODE TOPICS

1. Reinforce Street Level Use

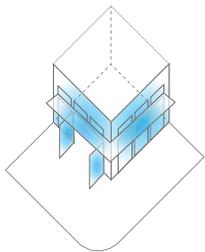
Requirements: On certain mapped streets the Code requires active uses from a prescribed list.

- Reexamine and refine qualifying uses. The current lists are broad and include many types of uses—some encourage pedestrian activity much more than others.
- Add new mapped locations and expand active use requirements to wrap corners (at least 40'). Although some streets have these requirements, corners often do not.
- Expand locations where "small commercial space" requirements apply, similar to current Pike/Pine overlay district.

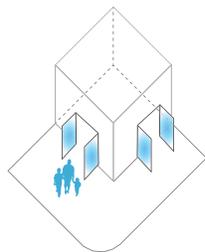
2. Strengthen Street Level Transparency Requirements:

The Code requires certain mapped areas to provide a minimum % of transparency.

- Increase the amount of required transparency. The case study average (78.9%) indicates recent development provides transparency well above the current 60% requirement.
- Add "low-iron, non-reflective glass" to what is considered 'transparent' to ensure all glass is clear.
- Prohibit interior shelving, partitions, signs and other visual obstructions from overlapping the required transparency.



17.5 ft
average ground
floor height



31.65 ft
average door
spacing at
commercial
sections

POSSIBLE NEW TOPICS

3. Increase Minimum Street Level Floor Height:

A minimum 13 ft floor to floor height is required only in certain zones; Downtown is not included.

- Add a minimum street level floor height requirement to Downtown and other high pedestrian zones.
- Increase the minimum floor to floor height to 15 ft and add a minimum clear height of 13 ft to ensure retail viability. The case study average (17.5 ft) indicates this is feasible.

- **Require Entrance Spacing:** Add a new standard requiring entrances at 35 ft or less for new construction and remodels.
- **Require Floor Lines to Step on Sloped Sites:** Add standards to ensure floor lines step along sloping sidewalks, to accommodate entrances and ensure activation on all streets.
- **Prohibit Recessed Moats along Sidewalks:** In designated pedestrian areas or zones, add code standards to prevent recessed light wells and other similar barriers that prevent interaction with the sidewalk.

- **Ensure Storefront Variety:** Design street level commercial spaces with vertical rhythms and materials that establish legible increments of 20-30 ft, with diverse and distinctive doors, materials and infill treatments, regardless of interior functions.
- **Create Pedestrian Scale and Interest:** Add code standards for 6-12" façade depth, composition, variation and pedestrian visual interest. Strengthen existing Design Guidelines that address this topic for all street levels.

Buildings Outlive Uses

All buildings influence—ideally for the better—the adjacent streets and public realm for their 50–100 year life spans. The initial ground floor uses will change, and storefronts regularly get remodeled over time.

New construction should provide rich and detailed street levels from initial construction. Subsequent remodels should personalize, reinforce and add pedestrian interest.

All projects, including remodels should design for future flexibility along the street level. To ensure long-term flexibility, certain structural design parameters are important. These and other key attributes of lively street levels are listed below by typical project type and scale.

FOR ALL PROJECTS INCLUDING TENANT IMPROVEMENTS + SMALL REMODELS

- **Large, clear glass:** not reflective or obscured
- **Lively interior activities:** operable windows and doors and open displays
- **Frequent, welcoming entrances:** every 20-30' and pedestrian scale details for visual interest
- **Spillover features:** seating, planters and/or merchandise



FOR MAJOR REMODELS + NEW BUILDINGS ALL LISTED ABOVE PLUS

- **Street level variety:** non-uniform architectural and storefront designs every 20-30'
- **Vertical rhythms:** vertical elements variety and facade depth
- **Light canopies:** full protection, glass and light colors for Northwest climate
- **Lighting:** integrated on building walls and/or canopies at pedestrian scale
- **Limited Sills/bulkheads:** no structural sills or storefront bulkheads along sidewalks, to accommodate future multiple entries and remodels



FOR NEW BUILDINGS ALL LISTED ABOVE PLUS

- **Open and flexible corners:** diverse commercial uses over time
- **Stepping with slopes:** step the perimeter floors to meet sidewalks
- **Generous floor to floor height:** 15 ft min for long-term tenant viability
- **Limited setbacks and street wall erosion:** active edges and uses on all setbacks and street-facing facades
- **Recessed perimeter columns/elements:** permanent elements should be minimized along sidewalks and recessed 1-3 ft to improve pedestrian visibility and allow future flexibility.



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