



City of Vancouver *Land Use and Development Policies and Guidelines*

Planning, Urban Design and Sustainability Department

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DOWNTOWN (EXCEPT DOWNTOWN SOUTH) DESIGN GUIDELINES

(formerly: Downtown Guidelines - (ii) Design Guidelines)

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Contents

	Page
1	Introduction 1
2	Public Open Space 2
2.1	General Objective 2
2.2	Guidelines 2
3	Social and Cultural Amenities 4
3.1	General Objective 4
3.2	Guidelines 5
4	Views 6
4.1	General Objective 6
4.2	Guidelines 6
5	Environmental 7
5.1	General Objective 7
5.2	Guidelines 7
6	Physical Design 9
6.1	General Objective 9
6.2	Guidelines 10

1 Introduction

These guidelines apply to the Downtown District, except Downtown South. For **Downtown South**, refer to **Downtown South and Granville Street Guidelines**.

The design guidelines prescribe the general criteria for new development and form the basis for the preparation of, and approval of development proposals. The design guidelines are also intended to encourage increased awareness of the immediate and overall environment. It is important to note that the densities listed in the Official Development Plan are maximums and not always necessarily attainable. In order to achieve the optimum density for any particular development, these guidelines will require close scrutiny and analysis by the architect and developer.

The design guidelines replace the yard requirements, the light angle controls and daylight obstruction angle requirements associated with regulatory Zoning District Schedules. Greater flexibility and variation and more interesting design is thus possible. The design guidelines are intended to go further than this insofar as they represent a quality control basis upon which to base design decisions and judgments.

The design guidelines do not require literal interpretation in whole or in part. They will, however, be taken into account in the consideration of development permit applications. The Development Permit Board may, in its discretion, refuse or require modification to a Development Permit Application proposal, for failure to meet the standards of these guidelines in whole or in part.

2 Public Open Space

2.1 General Objective

To provide varied, accessible, and, where appropriate, interconnected open spaces to be used by a wide range of people throughout the year. These spaces should provide areas for resting, and visual relief in terms of landscaping, also spaces for group activities, and in some cases spaces for larger public gatherings. Public open space is defined as space open to the general public without restraint during normal hours of transit operation, while semi-public open space is defined as space generally open to the public during the normal operating hours of the building with which it is associated.

"Open" space in this context means spaces open to the public whether or not they are open to the sky or partially or fully covered for weather protection.

2.2 Guidelines

2.2.1 Public Open Spaces At or Near Grade

Depending on the size, function, and location of the space in question, the following points should be considered in their design:

- (a) Spaces should be varied, interesting, and should be designed to reflect their different functions, activities, and topography. Elements such as level changes, plant material, and pattern should be carefully related;
- (b) Spaces associated with heavy pedestrian volumes should be designed to incorporate such uses as retail shops or restaurants, and where desirable provide areas for activities such as bandstands, street vending kiosks, and provisions for small public gatherings;
- (c) These places should also provide either in the same space or in close proximity, some of the following facilities for the convenience of the public:
 - Places to sit
 - Sheltered places
 - Bicycle racks
 - Washrooms
 - Drinking fountains
 - Sculptures
 - Clocks
 - Stages, platforms or rostrums
 - Ponds, pools and fountains

- (d) Such spaces should also provide lighting at pedestrian scale so as to encourage night use;
- (e) All facilities provided should meet the requirements set for the physically handicapped;
- (f) In the design of public open spaces, consideration should be given to creating views to:
 - the water and mountains
 - various streetscapes and urban landmarks
 - other open spaces

2.2.2 Semi-Public Open Spaces At or Near Grade

In the design of Semi-Public Open Spaces, items (a)-(f) should be given similar consideration. In addition:

- (a) Certain types of semi-public open space such as retail malls should be designed to be open to the public at least during normal hours of transit operation.

2.2.3 Semi-Public Open Spaces Below Grade

In the design of these spaces the same criteria as in Public Open Spaces and in Semi-Public Open Spaces should apply. In addition:

- (a) Daylight should, wherever possible, be allowed to filter into these spaces;
- (b) Where a substantial level difference results, escalators should be provided.

2.2.4 Semi-Public Open Spaces Above Grade and on Low Roof Levels

- (a) Public open spaces at low roof levels should be located adjacent to public elevators and should provide access to at least two exterior edges of the building;
- (b) In the design of such spaces, consideration should be given, where possible, to future linkages to similar spaces associated with adjacent buildings or structures;
- (c) Consideration should be given to the provision of "sun traps", wind shelters, and noise buffers;
- (d) Provision must be made to ensure the safety of persons occupying these spaces and the spaces directly below them, e.g., protect from dangerous items dropped from accessible roofs;

- (e) Such spaces should be provided with surface materials appropriate in durability and appearance to their public function;
- (f) They should be provided with appropriate lighting which would indicate their public function, enhance the city's skyline, and increase their safe use after dark;
- (g) Appropriate commercial and recreational uses should be encouraged in these rooftop locations to increase their use and safety through public supervision.

2.2.5 Open Space Links

Where public open spaces are provided adjacent to recognized pedestrian routes, the following points shall be taken into consideration:

- (a) Where an open space is part of or adjoins one of the pedestrian routes of the city, the design should be integrated with that route in order to emphasize and enhance the overall pedestrian quality of the area;
- (b) Where it is feasible and where a clear need can be demonstrated, the cooperation of a developer or a group of developers will be sought in providing pedestrian links above or below grade between various structures in order to bridge vehicular routes or other interruptions in the continuous pedestrian system, so that safe and pleasant pedestrian routes may be established between the major focal points of Downtown.

3 Social and Cultural Amenities

3.1 General Objective

In order to achieve a vital downtown, it is desirable to provide social and cultural amenities in addition to the various public space requirements.

Furthermore, an attempt should be made to preserve as much of the historic townscape of the City as possible and to preserve structures which feature materials and spaces that would be difficult to achieve today.

Where viable communities exist in Downtown, their presence should be maintained and reinforced. These communities are sometimes non-residential such as the financial community in the area of Hastings and Howe, or the shopping-retail communities which derive their character from the predominance of an ethnic group.

To strengthen these communities, it is advisable to encourage the presence of people working or living Downtown during the full 24-hour day and to attract a wide range of visitors and users throughout. For this reason, it is considered advisable to encourage mixed-use developments in these areas as well as generally throughout the Downtown.

3.2 Guidelines

3.2.1 Social and Cultural Amenities

- (a) Where possible and where need can be demonstrated, day care centres and community information centres should be included in a development;
- (b) Where possible and where need can be demonstrated, cultural facilities such as cinemas, theatres, and community halls should be included in a development;
- (c) Where possible and where a need is demonstrated, recreational amenities and sports facilities such as squash and handball courts, gymnasia, exercise and jogging areas, and swimming pools should be included in a development;
- (d) In the identification of specific social and cultural amenities desirable, the wishes of the community should be considered.

3.2.2 Preservation and Conservation

- (a) Demolition of historic and heritage structures will be permitted only with the permission of Council in consultation with Vancouver Heritage Advisory Committee;
- (b) Historically important structures on the site of a contemplated new development should where feasible be restored as a condition of development and incorporated into the overall design for the site;
- (c) Where appropriate, the alteration of significant old buildings to economic and viable uses in the interests of their preservation should be encouraged, provided that those changes respond to the guidelines for the area and observe all other by-law requirements;
- (d) New structures in an area of older buildings should respect their scale, window rhythms and general facade treatments.

3.2.3 Mixed Uses On A Single Site

- (a) Public uses should be concentrated at, and accessible from, the street. Similarly, public uses should orientate around strong "off street" existing and proposed pedestrian routes;
- (b) When special view corridors exist from the site, they should be available to the public by locating most of the public and semi-public uses towards the view;
- (c) Ground floor areas should be reserved for those public uses which have the highest occasional pedestrian traffic. Uses open to the public only during small portions of the day and creating only moderate traffic flow such as banks, are encouraged to locate on a level immediately above or below the ground floor;
- (d) Uses associated with motor vehicles, including truck loading, waste sortage and removal, should not be located on the ground floor nor in a location which conflicts with pedestrian movement patterns. These uses, where so located, should be screened from public view.

4 Views

4.1 General Objective

Existing views should be protected and, wherever possible, new views should be created from the pedestrian levels of any public and semi-public space. Views should include the following:

- (a) Views of the mountains and the water from street level and especially from street-ends ending near the waterfront.
- (b) Views of landmark buildings, art works, and special landscape features of Downtown.
- (c) Views and vantage points for viewing major pedestrian activity, and views of the most important activities of the city, such as the Port.

4.2 Guidelines

- (a) Long views to the water and to the mountains should be retained and special care in the massing of new developments at street ends should be taken to preserve these views from the ground, from selected pedestrian levels, and from other strategic locations;
- (b) Views of historic buildings from various locations in public and semi-public areas should be retained or created by careful massing of new developments;

- (c) Public viewing areas should be developed on the roofs of buildings where special panoramic views are available;
- (d) Other public viewing areas and platforms should be related to special points of interest. Such areas of special consideration are: viewing areas of the harbour, of the pleasure-boating community, of the commercial fishing fleet, and of the railroad activity around Downtown;
- (e) In certain instances special ground floor treatment may be encouraged so that the view potential for the pedestrian can be increased. This may result in ground floor treatment of more than usual ceiling height, building perimeters to be as column-free as possible, or building cores as slender as possible. Under these circumstances a transparent perimeter treatment of the ground level may be preferred;
- (f) In view-sensitive areas, such public amenities as pedestrian bridges, overhangs, awnings, and other forms of weather protection should be designed to minimize the view obstructions;
- (g) All new development proposals should consider the view characteristics of adjacent ground floor public areas, of surrounding buildings as well as the view potential of the proposed building itself.

5 Environmental

5.1 General Objective

Such environmental considerations as provision of sunlight, weather-protected pedestrian routes, and relatively wind-free open spaces, along with other design criteria, are necessary in new building design and within the total urban environment to ensure continual pedestrian use and a vital Downtown.

It is further recognized that the man-made environment of Downtown should be landscaped wherever possible in order to create a balance between man-made and natural forms.

5.2 Guidelines

5.2.1 Sun and Shade

New buildings should be located to prevent or minimize the shadows they may cast on any public or semi-public open space.

An analysis showing the impact of a development proposal on sun and shade conditions through diagrams and models may be requested by the City. New buildings should be particularly concerned with, and whenever possible minimize, the shadows they may cast on the opposing sidewalk or adjoining open spaces between the Spring and Fall equinoxes (March 21-September 21) between the hours of 11:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m.

Developments should locate their own public spaces so as to capture as much sun as possible; especially 'lunch hour' sun.

5.2.2 Rain and Snow

- (a) Where possible and appropriate, and where analysis has identified a need, based either on substantial existing or planned pedestrian volumes, weather-protected pedestrian routes should be provided. These could take the form of either arcades, overhangs, glazed walkways, or awnings;*
- (b) Where transit stops are contemplated, sheltered waiting areas and glass-covered walkways serving the transit stops should be incorporated into the building design of any new development.

5.2.3 Wind and Calm

- (a) New buildings which are substantially higher than the surrounding buildings in the area should be designed with due regard to wind vortex conditions. The introduction of such buildings should not increase the ground floor wind velocity appreciably;
- (b) In an area where wind vortex conditions already exist new buildings appropriately placed can substantially contribute to the improvement of existing conditions. The City may require evidence that wind conditions have been considered and the best building form and location has been chosen to improve existing conditions;
- (c) New developments should attempt to integrate into their design outdoor spaces of relative calm.

5.2.4 Noise Conditions

- (a) New buildings should be designed to comply with the sound level criteria established by the GVRD;
- (b) New buildings should incorporate into their design quiet, outdoor spaces;

* See also **Central Area Pedestrian Weather Protection (except Downtown South)**, approved by City Council December 12, 1978.

- (c) Certain streets, malls, and public open spaces should be designed as places where noisy activities such as bands, festivals, and parades can occur without disturbing sensitive and quiet areas.

5.2.5 Introduction of Nature

- (a) Existing mature trees should be preserved and protected where feasible. In new developments, an adequate space surrounding the roots and the crown of the trees shall be provided in order to guarantee the continuing existence of this form of vegetation;
- (b) The introduction of large trees, both evergreen and deciduous, will be encouraged. Special emphasis should be given to the introduction of trees along the major pedestrian routes and in all public and semi-public open spaces;
- (c) Water basins, fountains, and man-made waterfalls and cascades should be encouraged to animate public and semi-public places;
- (d) Generally, plants and other natural landscaping material should emphasize the desired character and function of the space in question. Opportunities should be explored to maximize on the range of sensory experiences offered by the introduction of natural elements; e.g. sounds, smells, colours, sense of season, etc.

6 Physical Design

6.1 General Objective

- The physical urban environment of Downtown should be of a very high quality;
- New structures should observe energy-conserving principles and include such related design features as are possible within the economic constraints of the building;
- The mass and height of new developments should minimize negative environmental effects such as are outlined under: wind, sun/shade, view, and other guideline categories;
- Regardless of total heights, new developments should create a pedestrian environment along their major sidewalks which is attractive to, and in scale with the pedestrian.

6.2 Guidelines

6.2.1 Architectural Design

- (a) Buildings should be sympathetic to the pedestrian environment and should avoid impersonal facades, especially at pedestrian levels. An appropriate environment can be encouraged by sensitive proportioning and dimensioning of, building elements, appropriate uses, choice of materials, detailing, textures, colours, lighting, street furniture, landscaping, and signage. In addition, the transparency of the facades and frequency of entrances contributes significantly to the interaction between building and pedestrian street traffic;
- (b) Tower portions of Downtown buildings should be evaluated with respect to their compatibility with surrounding structures, their contribution to the general skyline, their adherence to other guidelines and the intrinsic excellence of their form. Therefore, in addition to other considerations previously mentioned, their colour, reflectivity, shape, fenestration, materials, detailing and ease of maintenance will receive careful scrutiny.

Generally, lighter-coloured buildings are preferred;

- (c) Artwork as a permanent element of a building or an open space should be encouraged.

6.2.2 Bulk and Height

- (a) Where a proposal does not conform to the dominant existing pattern of development, and where the change from existing patterns is appropriate, new developments should attempt to integrate the varying elements by the provision of transitional structures, landscaping, etc.;
- (b) Developments exceeding ten floors should have tall, slender towers rather than bulkier towers of the same floor space ratio;
- (c) The size of the site will have an important bearing on the height, bulk and density that can be attained by any particular development. Any proposed design should consider thoroughly the relationship of the building size to the site area, configuration and surrounding physical environment;

On some sites, it may be inappropriate to design to the maximum densities permitted in the Official Development Plan.

6.2.3 Relationship to Immediate Area

- (a) New developments should contribute to the continuity of pedestrian activity and movement, particularly where pedestrian pathways and/or arcades are indicated;
- (b) Each new development or renovation should respond to the public amenities of the area as well as attempt to enhance the overall urban design quality of that area;
- (c) New developments in historically sensitive areas shall respect the scale and general design quality of their neighbouring buildings and attempt to blend into the overall design of the street or the area.

6.2.4 "Some Retail Required" Streets

On streets designated in the Downtown ODP as "some retail required", new developments should provide street fronting retail, particularly where there are street fronting retail uses on adjacent sites.

As an alternative, where it can be demonstrated to the satisfaction of the Development Permit Board or the Director of Planning that a specific block does not have a pattern of retail uses, in lieu of providing the required retail, new developments should be designed so that the ground floor could be converted to street fronting retail use, at a later date, by:

- (a) orienting the building facade to the front property line. Some ground level setbacks may be permitted, where a pedestrian amenity is provided or to provide for opportunities for sidewalk activities such as cafes;
- (b) designing a building structure that allows for retail, retail-commercial and service uses and storefronts;
- (c) providing windows and entrances;
- (d) ensuring that there are no blank walls on the street; and
- (e) designing floor plans that could be converted to shopfronts that are a maximum 30 feet in width.