



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

## **Planning, Urban Design and Sustainability Department**

453 West 12th Avenue, Vancouver, BC V5Y 1V4 | tel: 3-1-1, outside Vancouver 604.873.7000 | fax: 604.873.7100  
website: [vancouver.ca](http://vancouver.ca) | email: [planning@vancouver.ca](mailto:planning@vancouver.ca) | app: VanConnect

# **DOWNTOWN EASTSIDE/OPPENHEIMER DESIGN GUIDELINES**

*Adopted by City Council on October 26, 1982*

*Amended December 8, 1992, December 10, 2019, and June 7, 2022*



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## Application and Intent

These guidelines are a written and illustrated summary of the intent of many of the policies and regulations contained in the "Downtown Eastside/Oppenheimer Policy Plan" and "Official Development Plan". The guidelines do not replace those documents and should be read in conjunction with the "Downtown Eastside/Oppenheimer Official Development Plan" for a comprehensive guide for development in the area.

The guidelines are meant to highlight opportunities and issues, to provide guidance, and to illustrate practical suggestions for new development. Ideas should not be restricted to only those specifically mentioned here; exploration of creative options is encouraged.

## Format

These design guidelines have been organized into two categories:

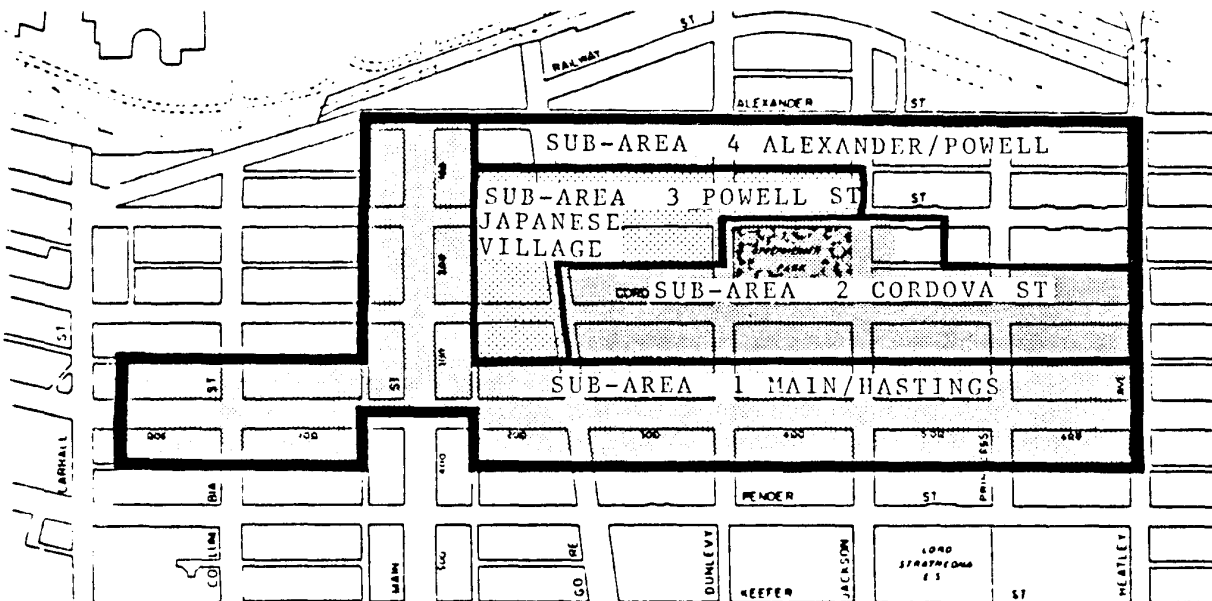
### Section 1: General Design Principles

These are meant to summarize basic urban design principles for the desired physical environment of the area as a whole.

### Section 2: Sub-Area Design Opportunities - Character Area Guidelines

This section offers specific guidance for each of the four sub-areas found in the Official Development Plan, highlighting special concerns or specific opportunities in these sub-areas. All the design principles listed in Section 1 are to be addressed wherever they apply.

## Downtown Eastside/Oppenheimer District and Sub-Areas



## Zoning Summary

Sub-Area No.	Sub-Area Name	Type of Area	F.S.R. Max.	Height	Other Special Regs.
1	Main/Hastings	High density. Mixed retail-office-residential.	1.0, except: with social housing: 3.0 Resid. 3.0 Non-R. 5.0 Mixed Resid. & Non-R.	30 metres max. (approx. 8 storeys).  11 meters min. (approx. 3 storeys) in part of sub-area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Office use limited on ground flr.</li> <li>- Office constr. above ground flr. requires 50% residential.</li> <li>- Office use not permitted where results from conversion from residential.</li> <li>- Retail continuity on ground floor.</li> </ul>
2	Cordova St.	Medium density. Residential.	1.0, except: with social housing: total 5.5	30.5 metres max. (approx. 8 storeys).	
3	Powell St./ Japanese Village	Medium density. Neighbourhood retail with office or resid. above. Japanese theme.	1.0, except: with social housing: total 5.5	30.5 metres max. (approx. 8 storeys)  7 metres min. (approx. 2 storeys).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Office use limited on ground flr.</li> <li>- Retail continuity on ground floor</li> <li>- Frontage limit for ground flr. uses.</li> </ul>
4	Alexander/ Powell	Medium density. Mixed light industrial-residential.	1.0, except: with social housing: total 5.5	30.5 metres max. (approx.. 8 storeys)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Frontage limit for non-resid.</li> </ul>

**NOTES:** In all sub-areas, conversion of rooms to dwelling units (over 1.0 FSR) permitted only with provision of social housing.

See map, page 1, for zoning and sub-area boundaries. This chart is only a summary for background information. Please refer to the "Downtown Eastside/Oppenheimer Official Development Plan" for zoning and development regulations.

# 1 General Design Principles

## 1.1 Transitional Character

### Context:

The Downtown Eastside adjoins several areas where area characteristics, objectives and impacts overlap and sometimes could conflict.

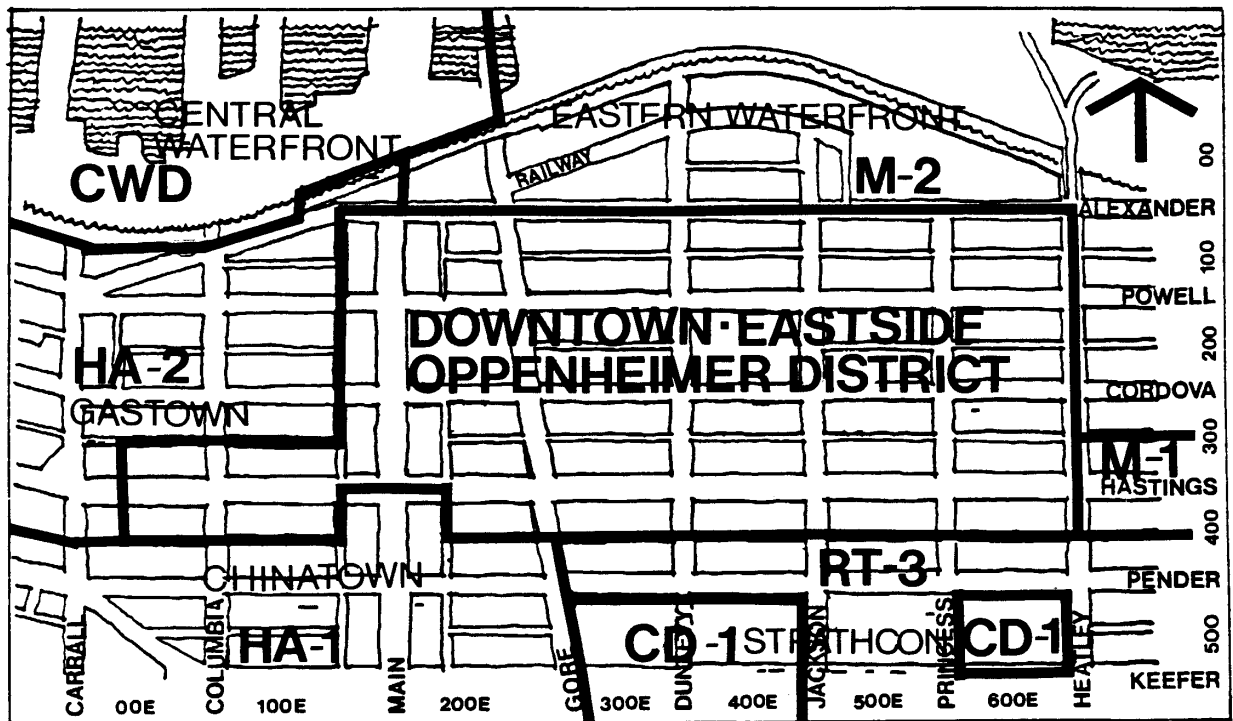
### Objectives:

Recognize the characteristics and objectives of adjoining areas. Seek to accommodate them and make a sensitive and harmonious transition between them.

### General Principles:

Developers of sites adjoining or close to Character Area, Zoning and Guideline boundaries should make themselves conversant with the objectives, regulations and processes for these areas in order to achieve appropriate transitional development.

The Map Below Identifies The Adjoining Districts And Zoning Schedules



## 1.2 Heritage Character

### **Context:**

The Downtown Eastside contains several designated heritage buildings as well as buildings with heritage merit and areas of heritage character.

### **Objectives:**

Preserve, reinforce and enhance heritage buildings, areas and groups of buildings and their settings.

### **Downtown Eastside - Heritage Buildings**

#### **Designated Buildings**

- |    |                  |   |                |
|----|------------------|---|----------------|
| 1. | St. James Church | - | 303 E. Cordova |
| 2. | St. Luke's Home  | - | 309 E. Cordova |
| 3. | Firehall #2      | - | 270 E. Cordova |
| 4. | Coroner's Court  | - | 240 E. Cordova |

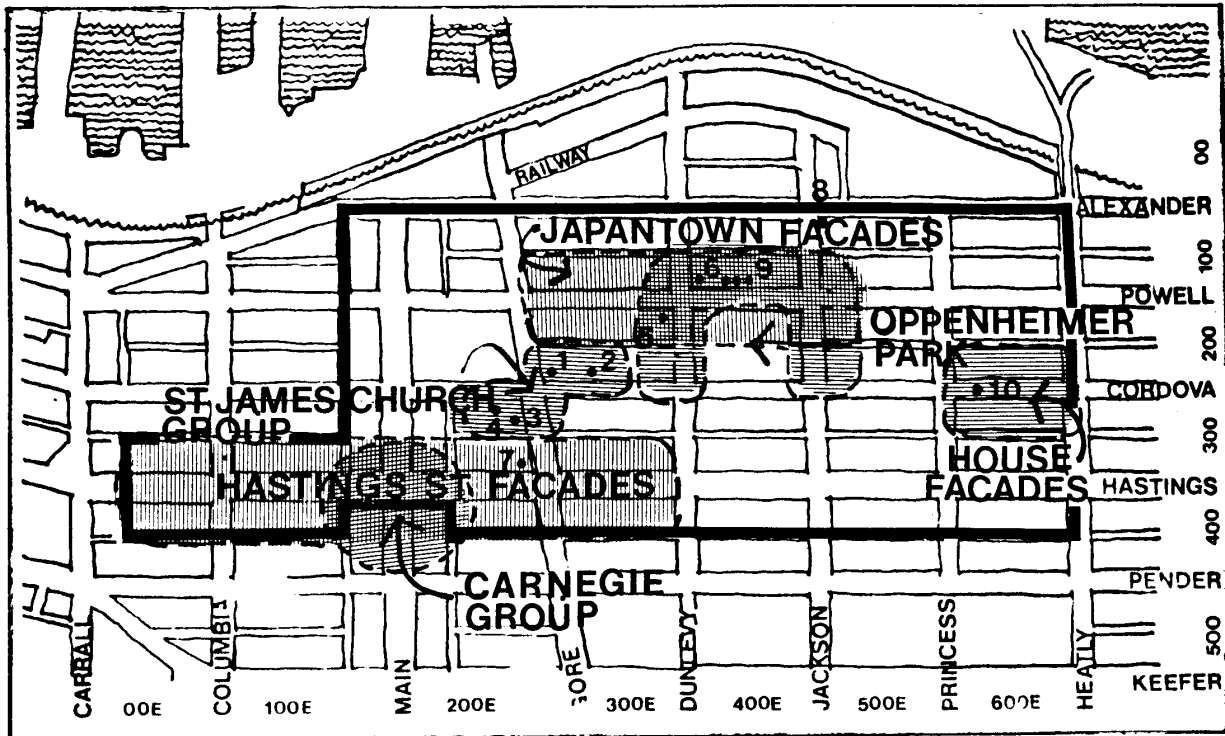
#### **Buildings recommended as having heritage merit in Downtown Eastside Policy Plan**

- |     |                            |   |                                   |
|-----|----------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| 5.  | New World Hotel            | - | 390 Powell St.                    |
| 6.  | Marr Hotel                 | - | 401 Powell St.                    |
| 7.  | Orange Hall                | - | 289 E. Hastings                   |
| 8.  | Sailors' Home              | - | 500 Alexander                     |
| 9.  | Boomtown Buildings         | - | 423 Powell St.                    |
|     |                            | - | 427 Powell St.                    |
|     |                            | - | 433 Powell St.                    |
| 10. | Turn-of-the-Century houses | - | 600 Block E. Cordova, both sides. |

#### **Downtown Eastside - Areas of Heritage Character**

Japantown  
Oppenheimer Park  
Carnegie Library Group  
St. James Church Group  
Hastings Street Facades

The Map Below Identifies Several Areas, Some Specific Locations And Individual Buildings Where Heritage Preservation Or Reconstruction Opportunities Exist.



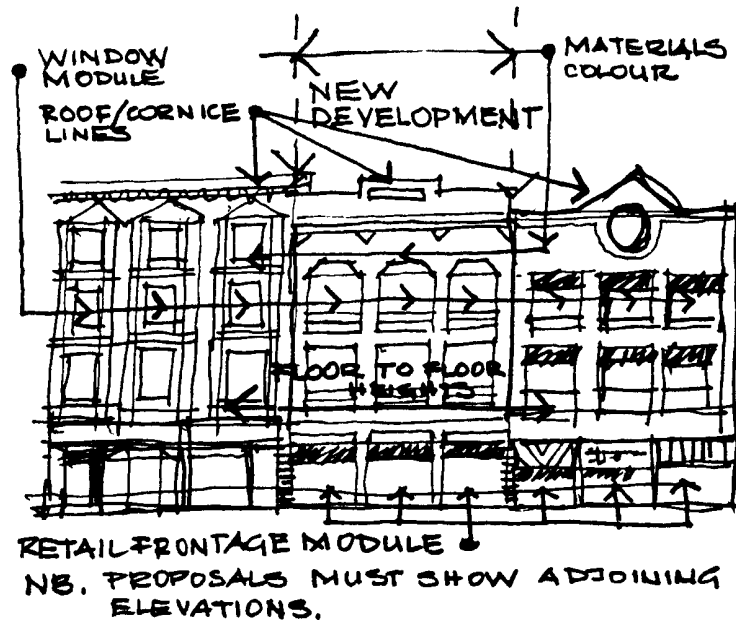
#### General Principles:

1. Heritage buildings, groups of buildings and characteristics of areas should be retained. Renovation and restoration of heritage buildings may render them eligible for relaxation of regulations as provided for in Section 1.5 of the ODP, "Relaxation for Heritage Merit".

RELAXATION  
FOR  
HERITAGE  
MERIT

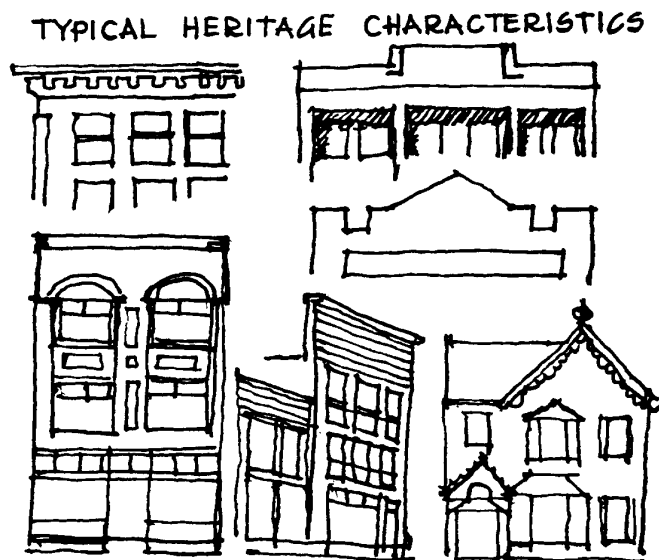
SEE  
SECTION 1  
PAGE 5  
DTES /OPP  
ODP

2. Where opportunities exist, new development should attempt to complete, improve and enhance the heritage setting of individual buildings or groups of buildings with heritage merit or potential. Heritage compatibility should be demonstrated by a thorough documentation of the existing context (photographs, adjoining elevations, analysis of heritage features and detail, etc.).



3. New developments should pay special attention to the heritage compatibility of the following aspects of adjacent developments:

Building height, bulk, placement, frontage module, floor to floor height, materials, roof lines and cornice lines, fenestration size, type and architectural detail, entrances, signage, lighting, landscape elements, decoration, colour and other special features as they apply.



### 1.3 Built Form

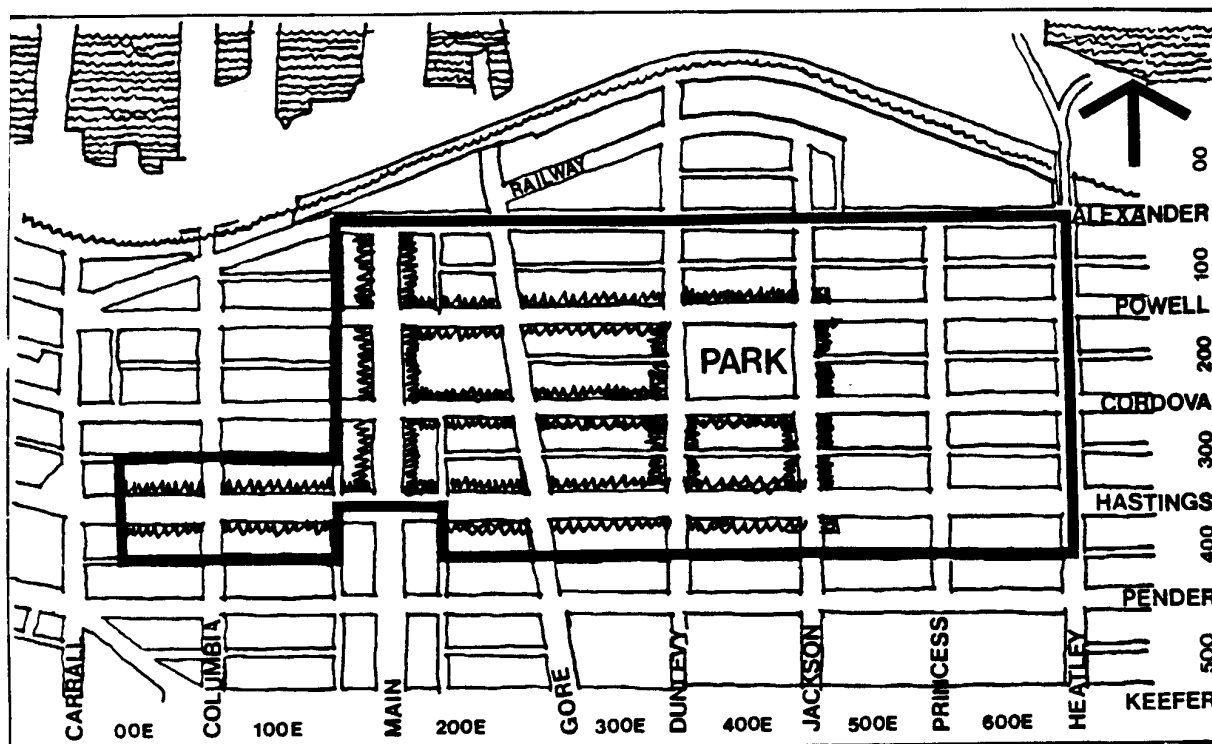
#### Context:

The Downtown Eastside/Oppenheimer area is one of the oldest established neighbourhoods in the city and the location of the original pioneer settlement. Subsequent redevelopment phases have added a variety of uses and architectural styles, the legacies of changing demographic characteristics (e.g. pre-war function as the Japanese community) and periodic redevelopment.

#### Objectives:

1. Preserve the low to medium rise (3 to 6 storey) character of development which distinguishes the neighbourhood and lends a sunny and intimate scale to its streets.
2. Reinforce the facade continuity and homogeneity of existing street-fronting development.
3. Respect and/or replicate significant architectural detail where such detail contributes to and reinforces the area's desirable qualities and character.
4. Maintain an exciting mixture of uses but seek to provide forms of development which mitigate the inherent environmental conflicts which can result.

The Map Below Shows Where Facade Continuity is Important

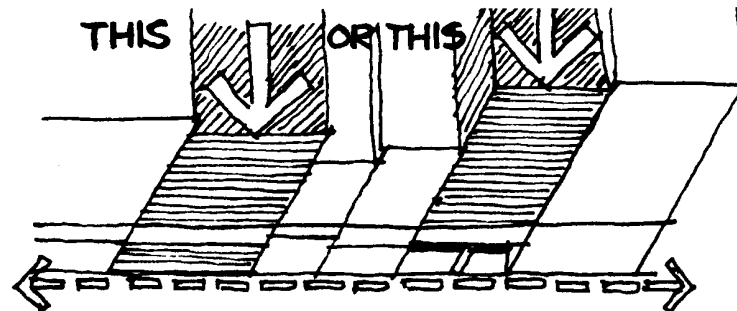


## General Principles:

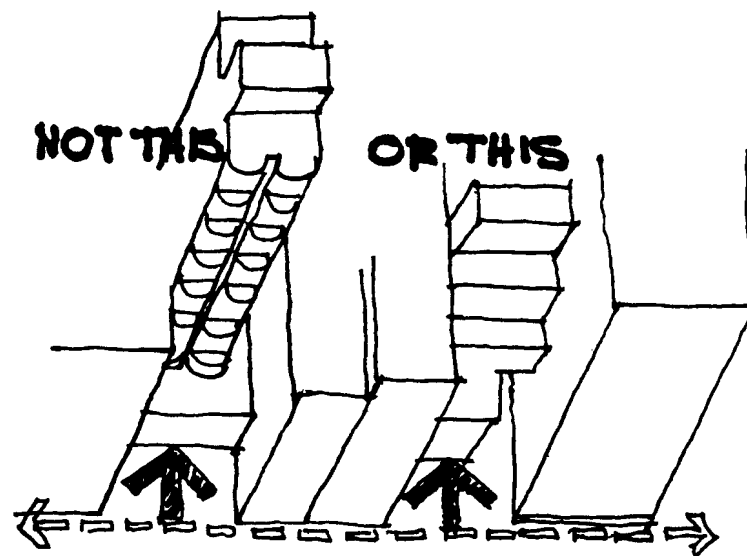
### 1. Facade Continuity

Wherever facade continuity is a feature of the streetscape new developments should reinforce the visual cohesion and continuity of those facades.

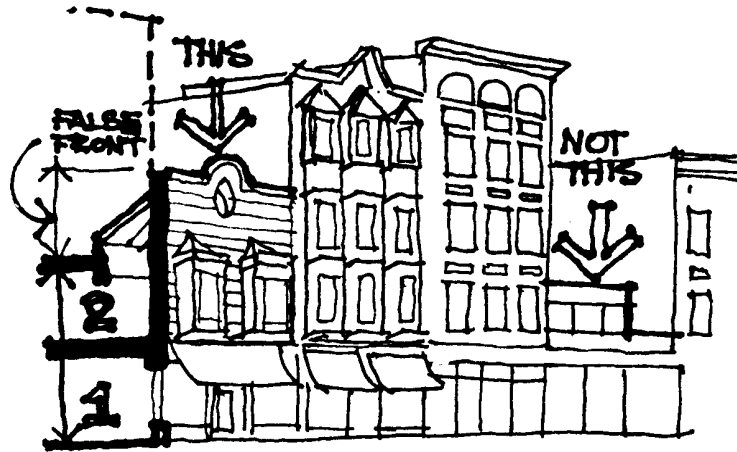
- a) Proposals should build to the line of the facade (usually at the street property line) especially for the first 3-4 storeys.



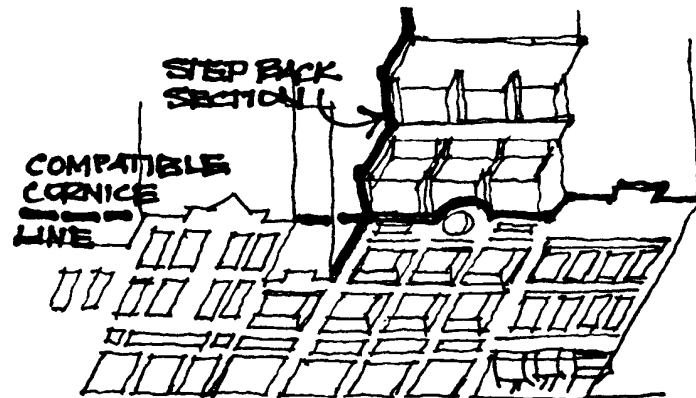
- b) Proposals should strive to maintain compatibility of cornice lines, floor to floor heights where these are strongly expressed, sign bands and any other elements which serve to unify the street elevation as a whole.



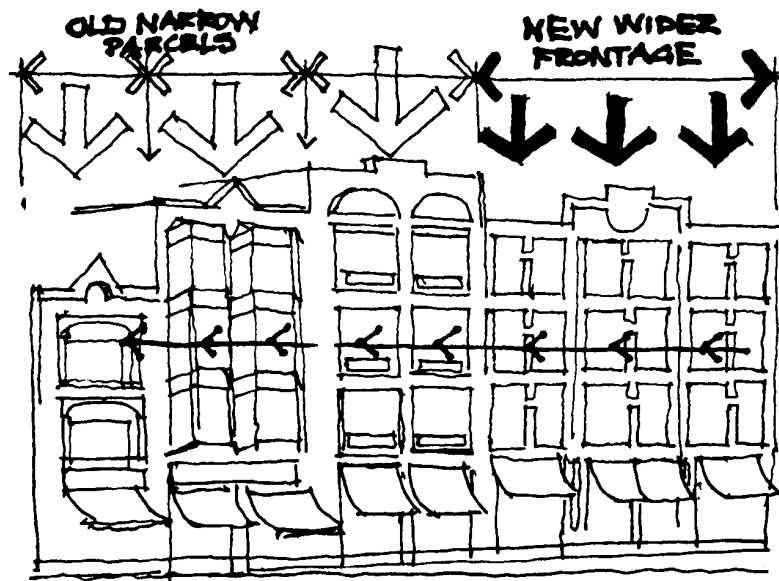
- c) Where buildings are proposed at the minimum regulation heights (see ODP) and the adjoining buildings are significantly higher, proposals should consider the use of high parapets, false fronts and cornices to approximate more closely the average height of the facade.



- d) Where buildings are proposed which are significantly higher than adjoining buildings likely to remain, proposals should consider the use of setbacks above the average existing height of buildings to maintain the cohesion of the street elevation.



- e) Where the average frontage of developments in a street facade has created a distinct pattern of development, projects with a larger than average frontage should seek to maintain this pattern by articulating their facades to reinforce this pattern.

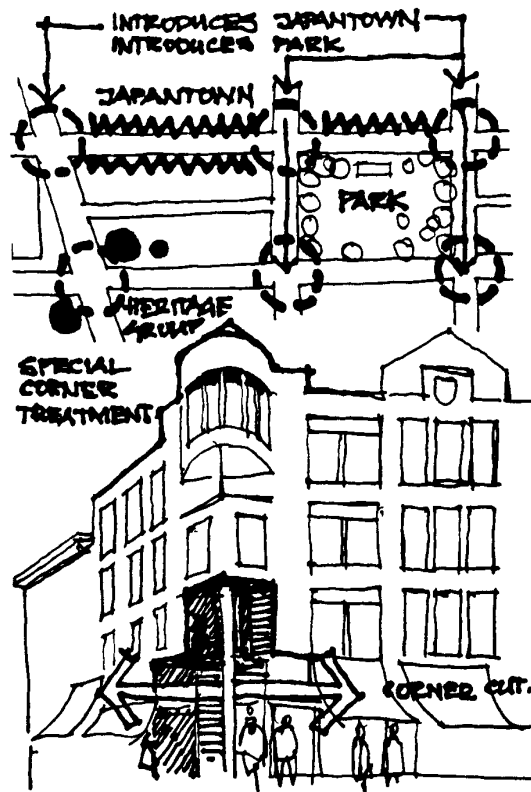


- f) Wherever special detail - e.g. bay windows, recessed balconies, over-hanging cornices or materials (such as brick) - have established a recognizable character, new developments should try to use these in a manner compatible with the established character of the street facade (except that the construction of bay windows projecting over the property line is not permitted by the Vancouver Building By-Law).

2. Corner Developments

Developments in corner locations, but especially on important corners which define open space, or otherwise contribute to the overall character of the neighbourhood, should respond to their double frontage and to the special opportunity they have to add character and image to the neighbourhood. Also, developments in corner locations are more likely to constrain public views of the Vancouver setting or landmark buildings. Where this is a concern, the project should employ special measures to retain and enhance these views - e.g., setbacks, pedestrian level undercutting of buildings, special framing of views, etc. Important views are:

St. James Church  
Waterfront and Mountains  
Oppenheimer Park  
Carnegie Centre  
Downtown Skyline



### 3. Built Form Character

Wherever new development adjoins older development considered important to the character of the neighbourhood, even if such older buildings may eventually undergo redevelopment, the new proposals should respect the established character and seek to use building forms which are compatible in the interim and sensitive to the community's long term preservation objectives.



In residential areas, new developments, with much higher floor space than existing neighbouring buildings, should strive for a gradual and continuous evolution of the existing character, accommodating the anticipated densification, while still respecting the historical characteristics and detailing.



**Refer Also:**

"Guidelines for New Development Adjacent to Hotels and Rooming Houses" (regarding setbacks for light wells and side yards).

## 1.4 Vehicular Movement

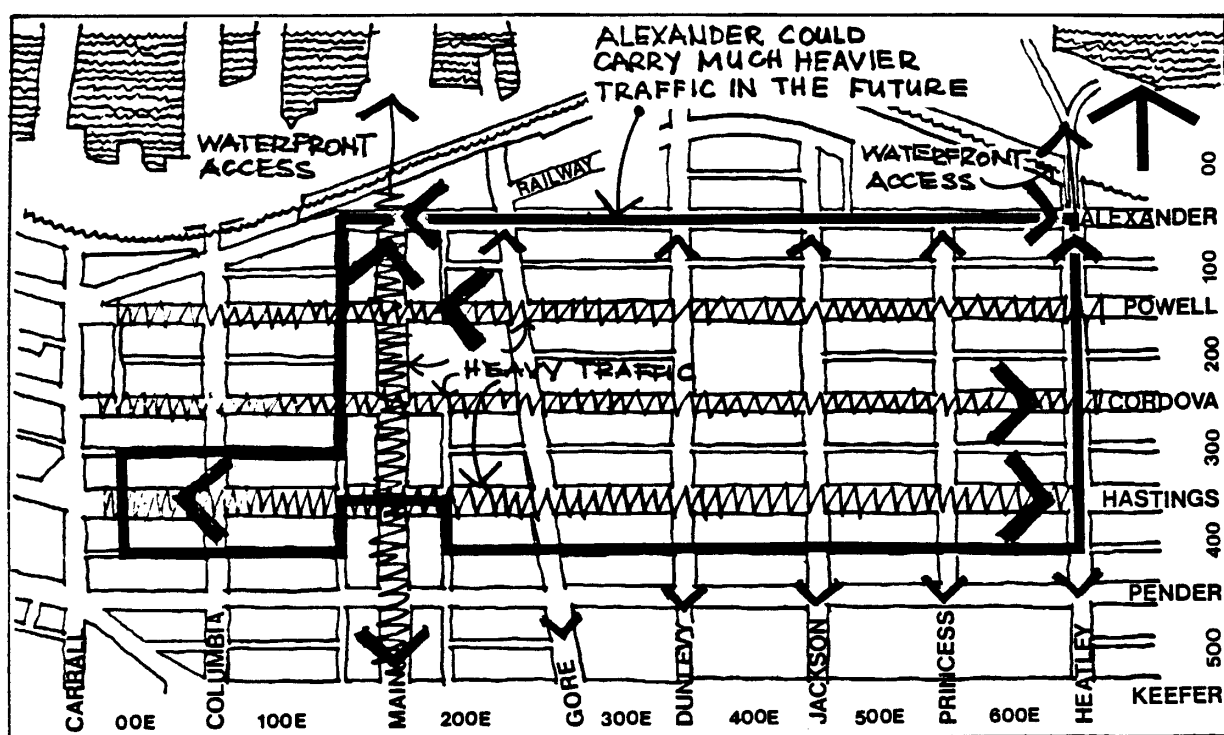
### Context:

In the Downtown Eastside, Hastings, Cordova, Powell and Main Streets all carry heavy arterial vehicular and truck traffic loads. Alexander Street, although presently lightly used, could carry heavier traffic in the future. Traffic on other north/south streets is lighter except that Heatley Street is the major truck access to the waterfront.

### Objectives:

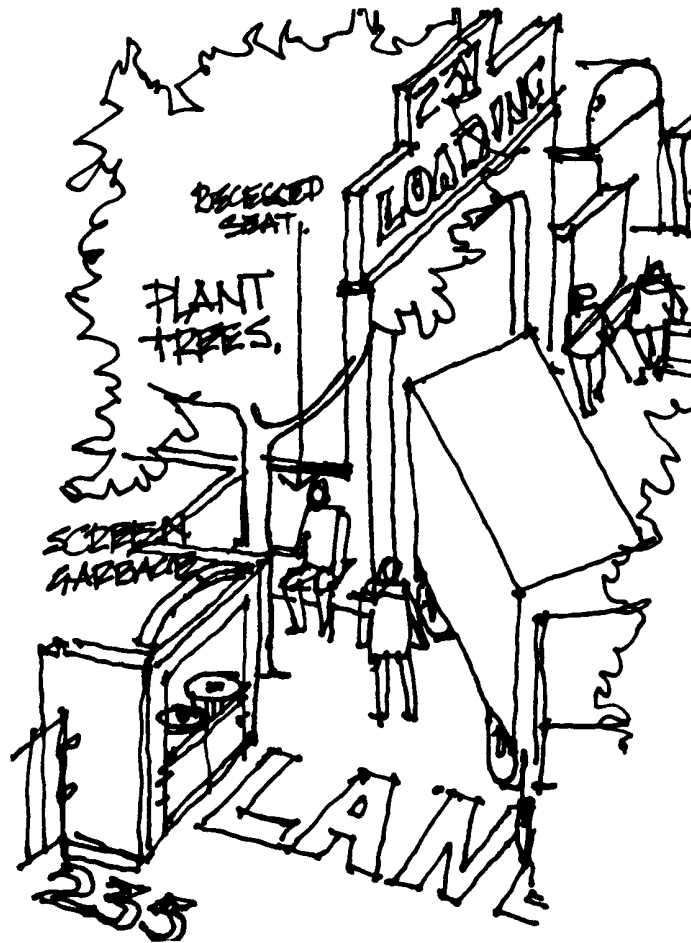
1. Improve the area's living/working environment by attempting to reduce the adverse impacts of high traffic volume.
2. Notwithstanding the primary arterial function of many streets, attempt to communicate their local identity and community function.

The Map Below Summarizes the Main Traffic Characteristics of the Area.

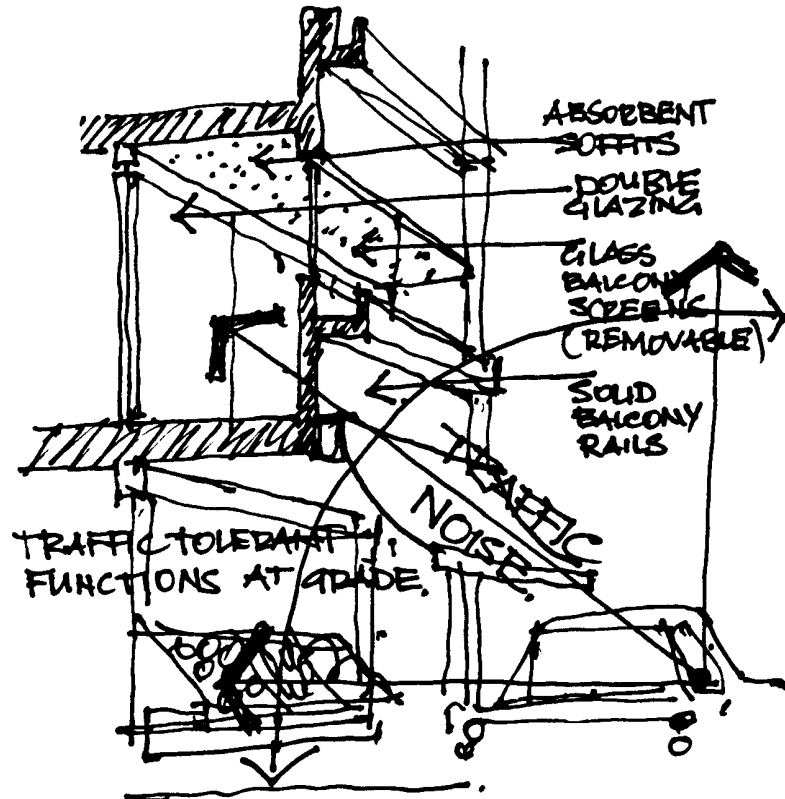


### General Principles:

1. No access to parking or loading from primary/arterial streets.
2. Maximize the use of lanes for service, parking, and goods distribution.
3. Encourage general upgrading of lane paving, laneside landscaping of developments, attractive treatment and screening of loading and other service areas.



4. New developments on streets carrying heavy and noisy traffic loads should attempt to attenuate their interior noise levels by locating their noise sensitive functions away from the traffic noise source, considering the use of double and triple glazing, screening noise sources and generally applying good acoustic design principles. Noise reduction principles are especially important for residential uses.



## 1.5 Pedestrian Movement and Weather Protection

### Context:

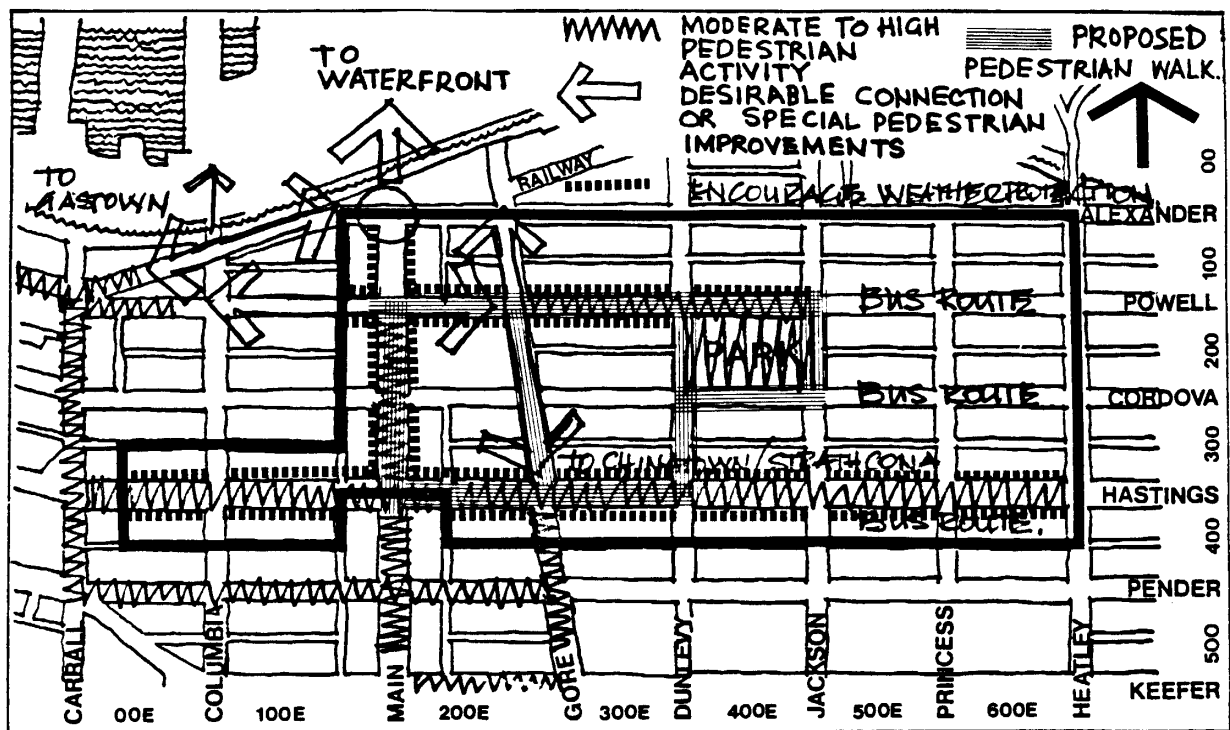
Most of the Downtown Eastside carries primarily local pedestrian traffic. Many of the area's residents do not own cars, and, as older people often living in small rooms, they enjoy outdoor walking and sitting as primary recreational activities. Hastings Street, with high pedestrian volumes and the major transit route, is frequented by shoppers from other areas as well as local residents. The Downtown Eastside also adjoins several areas with existing or future pedestrian orientation (Gastown, Chinatown and future waterfront development).

### Objectives:

1. Improve the general convenience, comfort, safety and pleasure for pedestrians in the area.

2. Improve the area's pedestrian connections to other areas of pedestrian activity and co-ordinate improvements.
3. Encourage continuous weather protection of active pedestrian routes, areas where pedestrians congregate, and active retail areas.

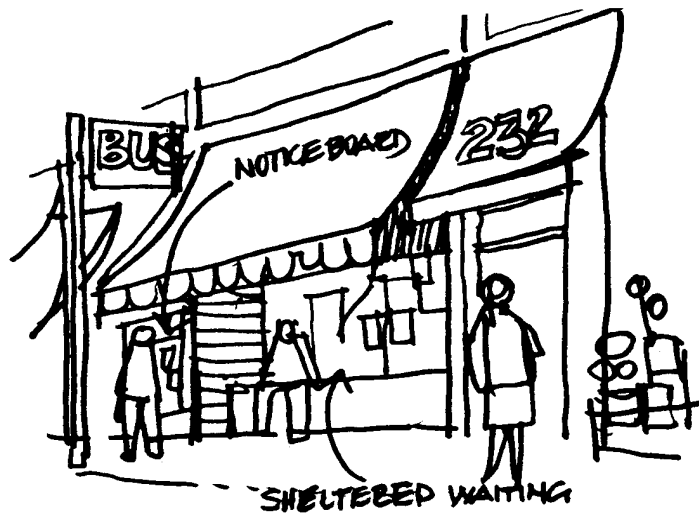
The Map Below Summarizes The Primary And Secondary Pedestrian Movements Desirable Links And Opportunities And Where Weather Protection Should Be Encouraged.



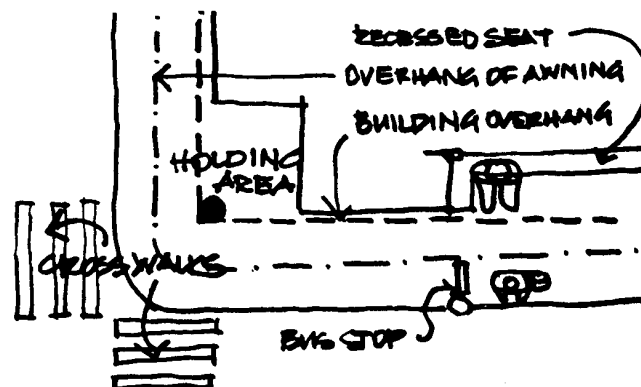
#### General Principles:

1. Ensure that wherever significant pedestrian movement occurs, development in general, including street level facade treatment and fronting yards, make an extra effort to provide pedestrian interest:
  - a) Provide public seating;
  - b) Ensure that pedestrian areas are well lit for safety and supervision; and
  - c) Provide opportunities for public advertising of community and cultural activities.

- d) Provide trees and landscaping where appropriate.

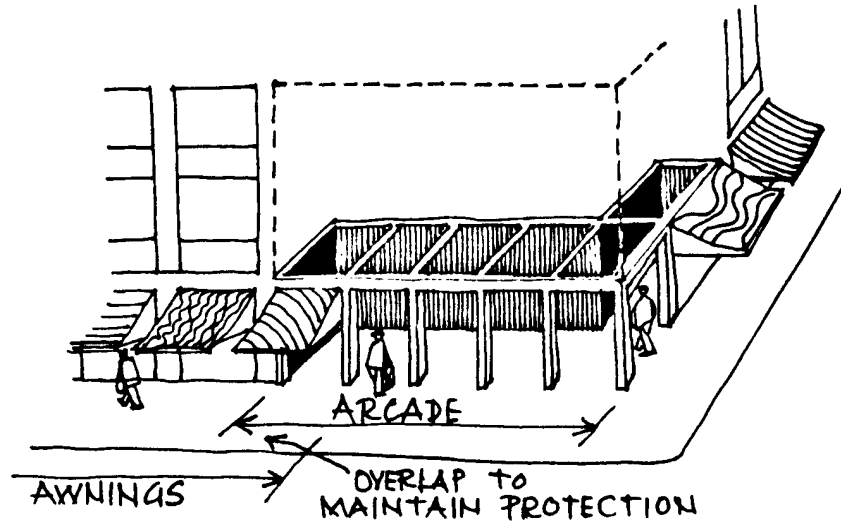


2. Wherever significant pedestrian flows are likely to bunch up or groups are likely to gather (e.g. traffic lights or other crossings, entrances to public buildings, opposite transit stops) consider increasing sidewalk pedestrian holding capacity by recessed, weather protected indentation of building facades or other methods appropriate to the location.



3. Provide weather protection in the following locations:
- a) Along primary pedestrian routes as indicated for weather protection on the map, page 16.
  - b) Where retail continuity is required or encouraged (see map, page 19).
  - c) At transit stops or other public waiting areas.
  - d) At public building entrances and other public areas.

- e) At building entrances.
  - f) A portion of all outdoor seating areas.
4. Wherever continuous weather protection is indicated, consider: awnings, arcades, canopies or recessed entrances, etc. - noting the need for maximum continuity and alignment wherever possible, and also considering the compatibility of signage, lighting and architectural detail.



**Refer Also:**

1. Guideline for Retail Continuity, pages 18 to 21.
2. "Central Area Pedestrian Weather Protection (except Downtown South)".

**1.6 Retail Continuity**

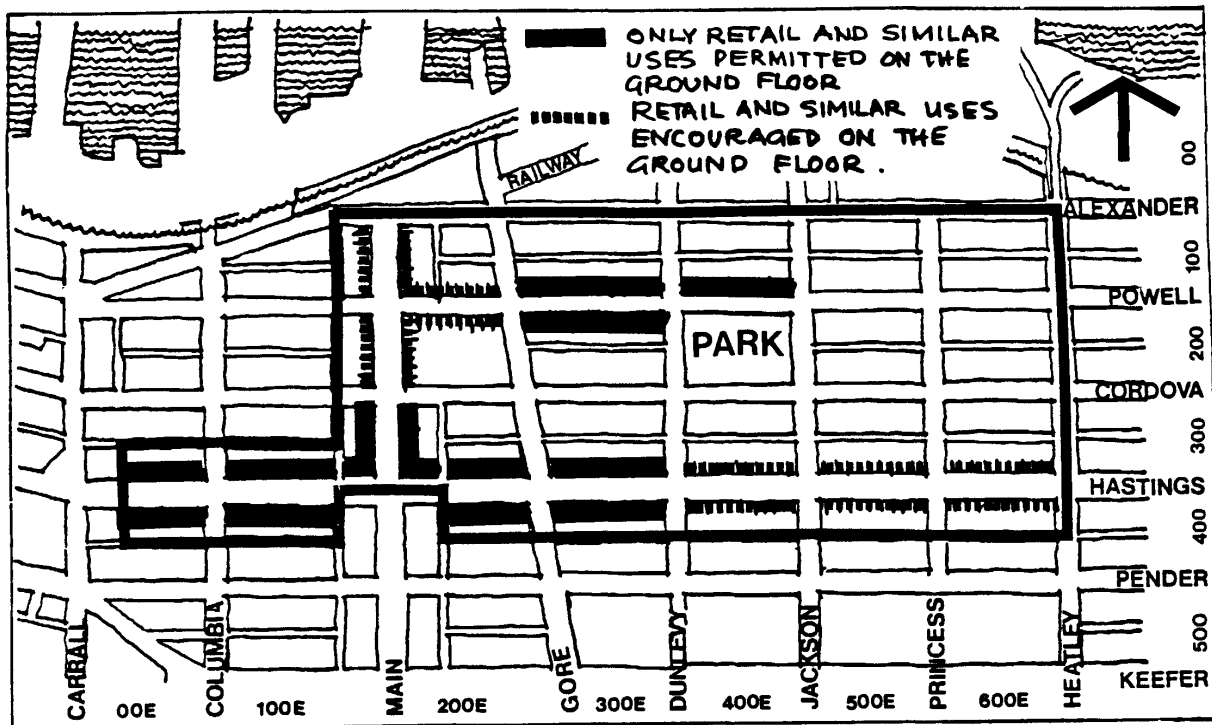
**Context:**

In the Downtown Eastside retail concentrations exist on Hastings Street and on Powell Street, the "Japantown" area. Although retail activity on Main, north of Hastings, is light, the future development of the waterfront could confirm the foot of Main Street as a major gateway to the waterfront.

**Objectives:**

1. Maintain and reinforce the retail function of Hastings Street.
2. Maintain and reinforce the retail function of Powell Street and emphasize its Japanese character.
3. Preserve options to extend retail activity north on Main Street to the waterfront.

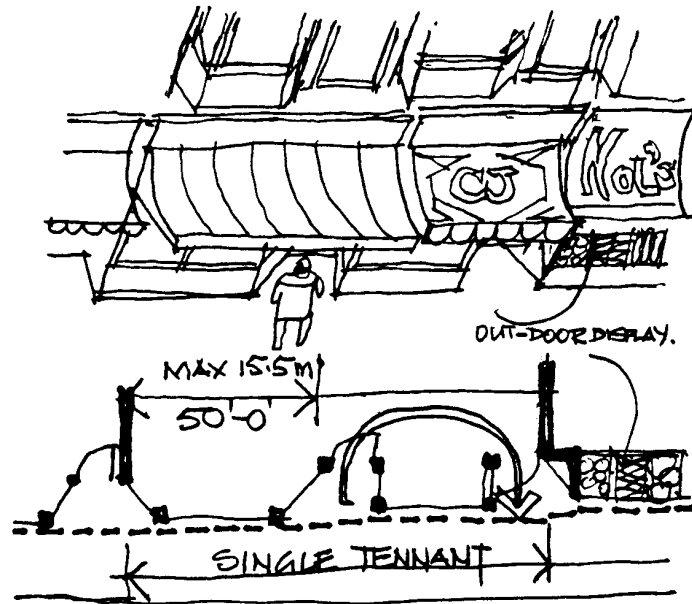
The Map Below Summarizes Where Retail Continuity is Required Or Encouraged



**General Principles:**

In areas requiring or encouraging retail continuity at ground level:

1. New developments should minimize disruption of retail continuity, and encourage a variety of smaller scale active retail uses and tenancies at grade. (See ODP Section 6.6.2 for regulations on retail frontage.)



2. Inactive retail uses (e.g. banks, credit unions, etc.) should be discouraged, especially when proposals will adjoin and extend existing inactive uses and/or when the aggregate of such space in any block at one time will result in a severe dilution of its active retail character.

3. Underdeveloped sites and surface parking lots should be encouraged to develop to retail uses. In the interim, pending development, they should be encouraged to support the continuous retail image and function by confining vehicular access to the lane and providing continuous "architectural screening" which would stimulate the characteristics of retail continuity at the line of retail, while also ensuring some visual supervision from the street for security.



4. In areas where retail uses are encouraged but not required, ground floor uses, if not immediately assigned to retail, should, however, be designed for easy conversion to retail use in the future.

## 1.7 Mixed Uses

### Context:

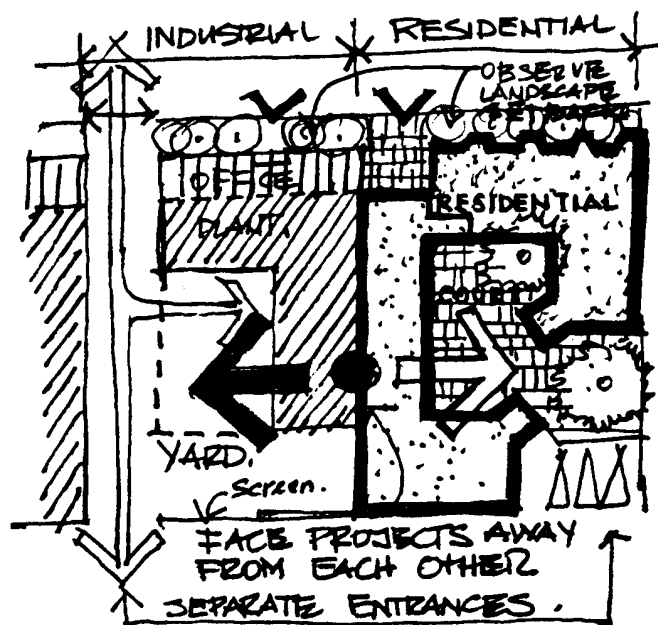
The Downtown Eastside/Oppenheimer Area contains a great mixture of uses. Many of the combinations have contributed greatly to the richness and character of the neighbourhood. Some combinations, especially those situations mixing industrial and other uses either on the same or on adjoining sites, require special measures to make them compatible.

### Objectives:

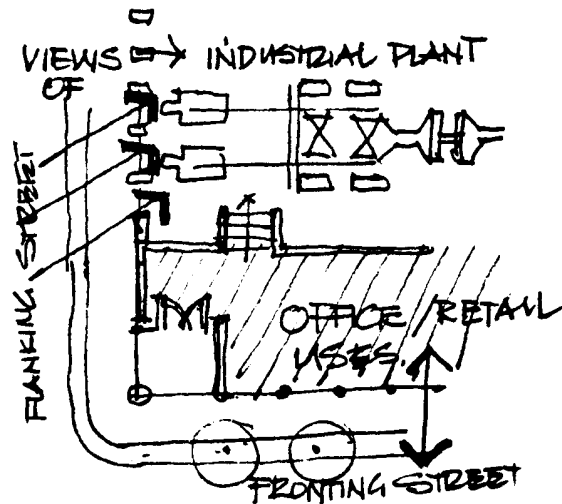
1. Preserve and encourage the mixed use character of the area but resolve use conflicts where they exist or are likely to occur.
2. Ensure that where residential uses may be affected by adjoining development the applicant ensures that his proposal addresses and solves the problem of maintaining an adequate residential environment.

### General Principles:

1. Wherever residential uses adjoin industrial uses and especially where the residential uses are meant for families with children every effort should be made to minimize impacts on the quality of the residential environment which arise from the juxtaposition of a particular industry and residential use especially impacts on safety, night noise, lighting, air quality, traffic and the visual environment.



2. Wherever any development which contains manufacturing uses includes also office space or retailing facilities of any kind these should be placed to face the fronting street. Manufacturing facilities on corner sites should avoid blank walls on flanking streets and where such facilities do not include either retailing or office uses they should still attempt to provide pedestrian interest perhaps by permitting street traffic some view of interesting internal processes or activity.



## 1.8 Open Space

### Context:

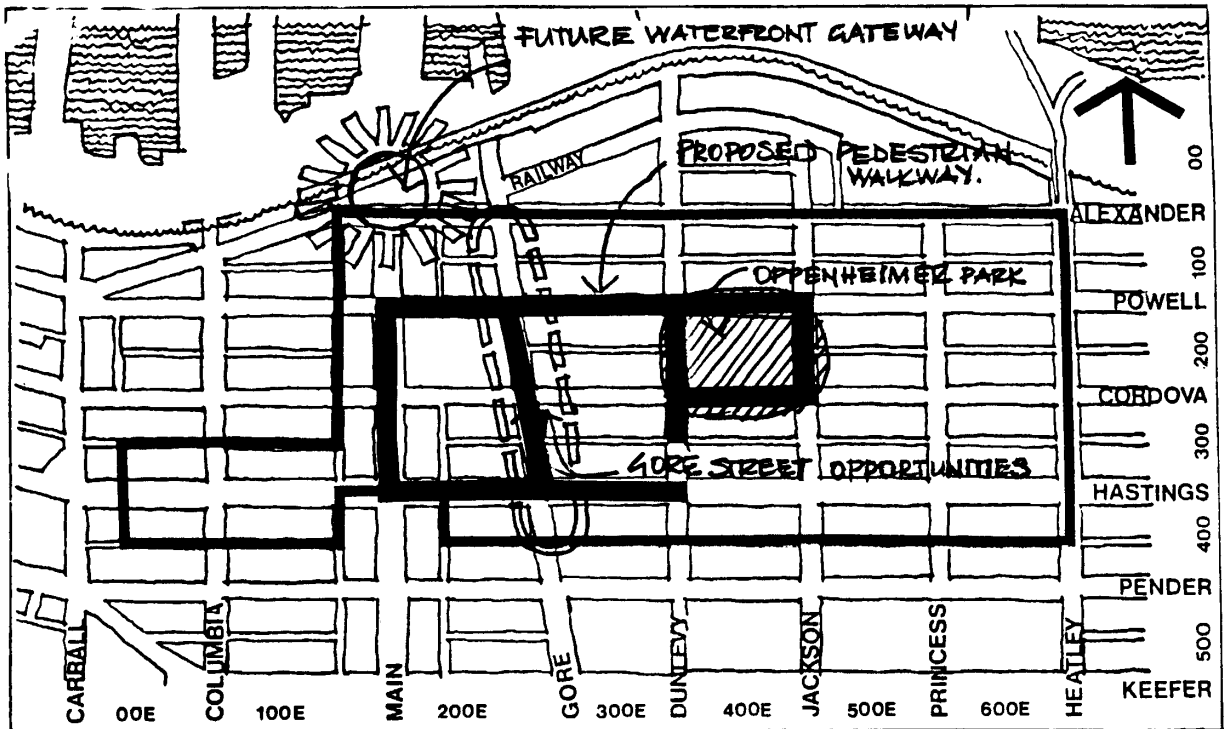
Oppenheimer Park is the focus of the local resident community and the only significant open space in the area.

The Downtown Eastside/Oppenheimer area is generally deficient in private and semi-private open space especially for residential uses. Many of the area's residents are older people who live in small rooms and enjoy outdoor sitting and walking as primary recreation activities.

### Objectives:

1. Improve the usability, attractiveness and safety of Oppenheimer park.
2. Maintain options to develop a future major "waterfront gateway" open space at the foot of Main Street.
3. On Gore Street, maximize the opportunities presented by wider sidewalks, deeper setbacks, heritage buildings and lighter traffic to create a system of sidewalk related mini-parks, and sunny resting places.

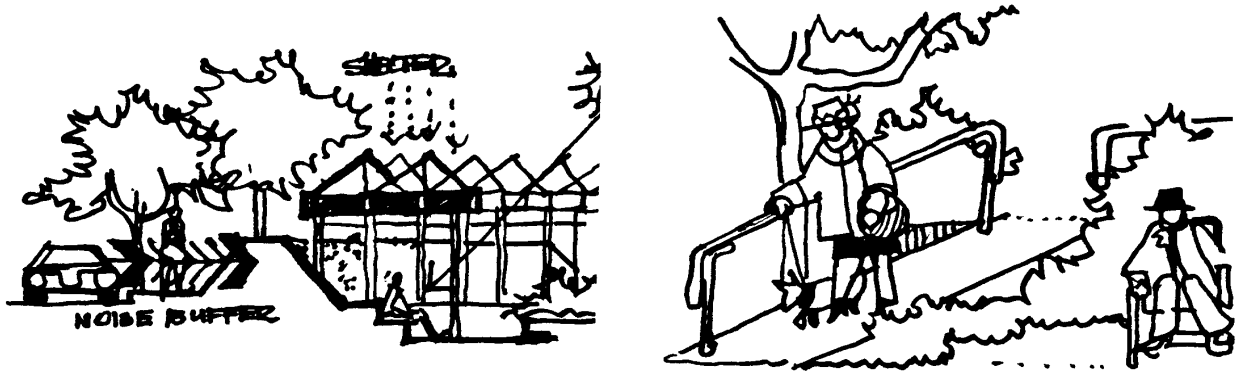
4. Encourage the provision of useable private and semi-private open space, especially in residential development.
5. Encourage development and use of the proposed pedestrian walkway as part of the area's open space system.



### General Principles:

1. All Open Space
  - a) Sunlight: Open space should be located to maximize available sunlight.
  - b) Shelter: The design of space should consider the impacts of the seasons and climate and provide weather protection where appropriate.
  - c) Noise: Open space should be located and designed to minimize noise.
  - d) Presence of nature: Open space should provide free opportunity to experience nature and seasonal change.

- e) Safety: Open space must be safe for all user groups and age groups.
- f) User program: Open space design should accommodate and be equipped to meet the needs of the anticipated activities and user(s).

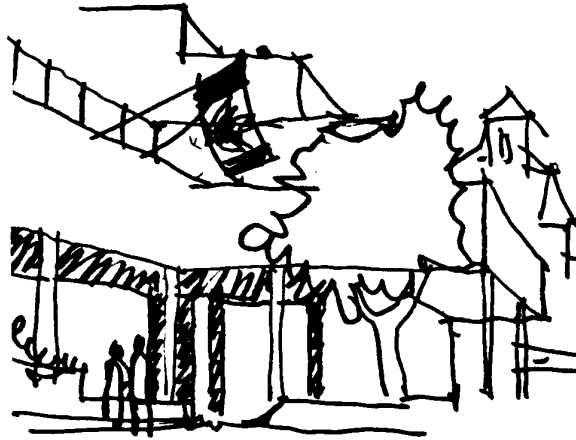


## 2. Public Open Space

- a) Public open space should be designed on the basis of a thorough investigation of the local program requirements with, where possible, the involvement of the potential users.
- b) Public open space should provide seating, lighting, hard and soft surfaces, recreation and play equipment, paths, plazas and planting in locations and quantity indicated by the program.

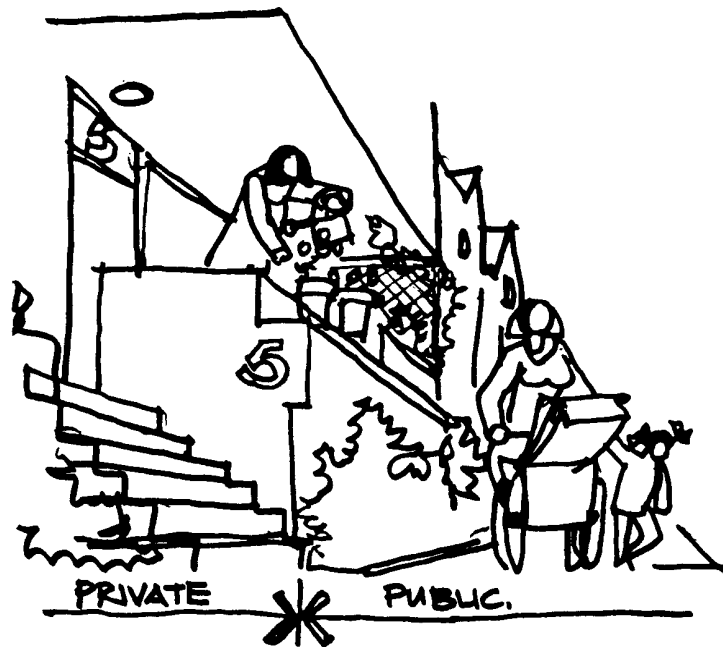


- c) Public open space should be designed for easy maintenance.
- d) Existing and permitted institutional or social service facilities should, in particular, be encouraged to provide public open space wherever feasible and appropriate.
- e) Encourage private development to provide public open space wherever opportunities occur to support the area urban design objectives or special local opportunities. (See Sub-Area Design Opportunities - Section 2.)

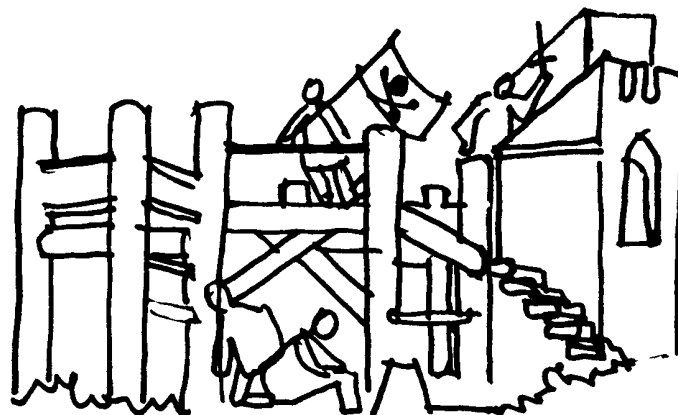


3. Private and Semi-Private Open Space

- (a) All private and semi-private open space should be clearly defined as such and should be controllable by those meant to benefit and be responsible for it, thus encouraging use, pride of "ownership" and safety.



- (b) New developments likely to include children should make a special effort to provide equipped, easily supervised and secure off street play areas.



- c) In addition to conventional front and rear yard open space (applicable where appropriate) higher density multiple developments should consider the use of courtyards, rooftops, terraces and balconies as alternative sources of private and semi-private open space.



## 2 Sub-Area Design Opportunities: Character Area Guidelines

### 2.1 Sub-Area 1: Main/Hastings: Issues/Opportunities

#### 2.1.1 Foot of Main Street

The foot of Main Street will increase in its importance and become a major access point to redeveloped waterfront in the future. To reinforce this role, a major street end open space should be created. This open space would occur on land north of Alexander Street and outside the Downtown Eastside boundary. However, developments in the vicinity should recognize the opportunity to maximize any future potential by ensuring that they do not cast excessive shadow on properties north of Alexander and that they orientate fenestration and active uses accordingly.



### 2.1.2

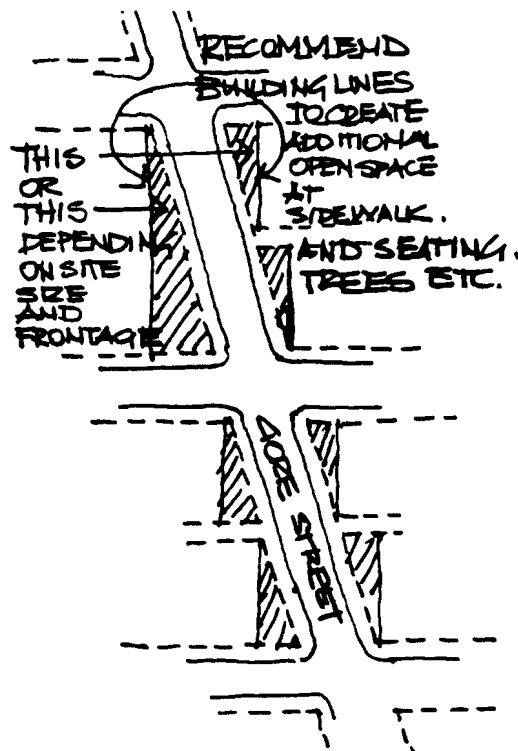
#### Carnegie Library Group

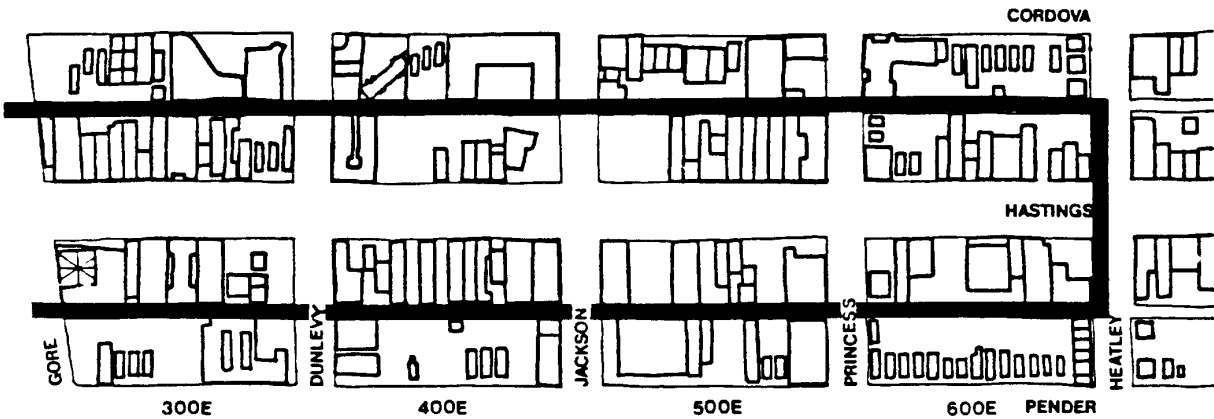
The intersection of Main and Hastings is occupied by buildings of special architectural and urban design importance focussing on the Carnegie Library, a landmark structure. Developments should therefore maintain and improve the visual importance and architectural setting of the Carnegie Library, i.e. consider the visibility of the dome, compatible scale for adjoining development, special sidewalk treatment, lighting, landscaping, signage and compatibility of materials, detail and colour schemes in the vicinity.

#### Special Opportunity: Gore Street

Gore Street with relatively light vehicular traffic is potentially an important pedestrian connector linking the waterfront to Chinatown/Strathcona via all four sub-areas of the DTES/Oppenheimer area.

Because of its non-conforming alignment, angled to the grid, Gore Street offers some special street design and street orientated open space opportunities, if the pattern and precedent (see Fire Hall and Remand Centre) of buildings at right angles to the E/W streets is respected. This generates a substantial component of privately owned public open space which can be added to the sidewalks to create a special pedestrian character and preserve and improve the views of street corners and buildings.

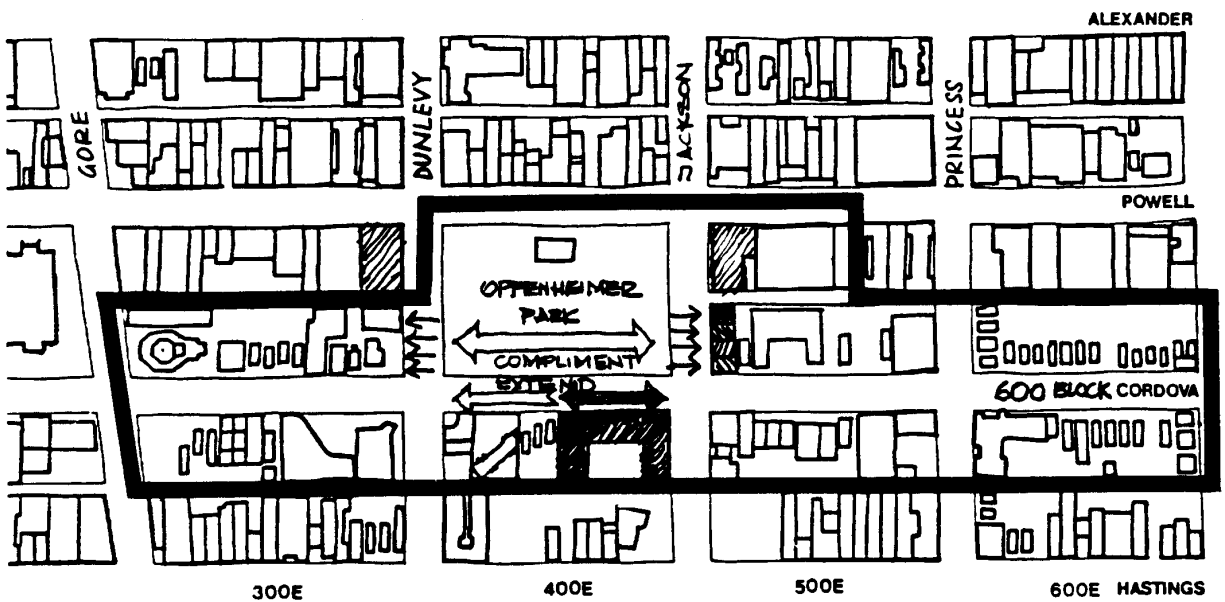




### 2.1.3 Institutional Uses:

Institutional uses on Main north of Hastings (Courthouse, Public Safety Buildings, etc.) have diluted its pedestrian character and street level interest. Approval of future alterations to these buildings should be contingent on street level improvements including greater transparency of street level facade, weather protection, special landscaping, etc.

## 2.2 Sub-Area 2: Cordova St.: Issues/Opportunities



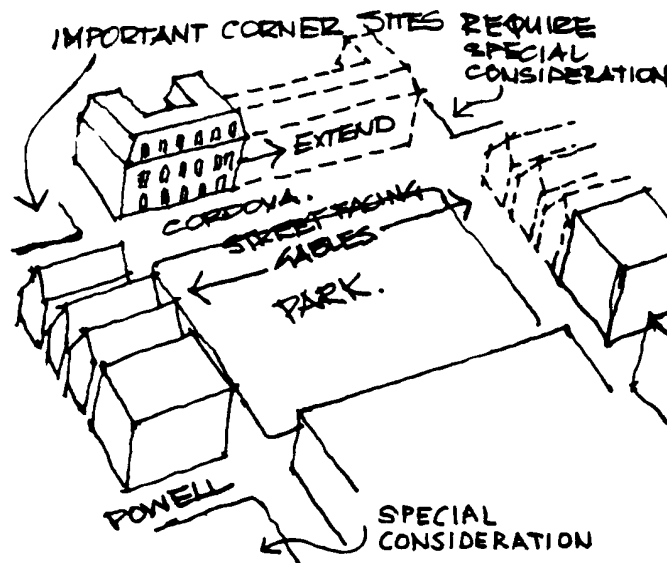
Sub-Area 2 includes Oppenheimer Park and some important historical housing groups in the 600 Block Cordova and on Jackson adjoining the park. Otherwise, this area designated for residential development featuring a variety of household types lacks cohesion or consistency.

**See Also Special Opportunity Gore Street in Sub-Area 1.**

**Oppenheimer Park:**

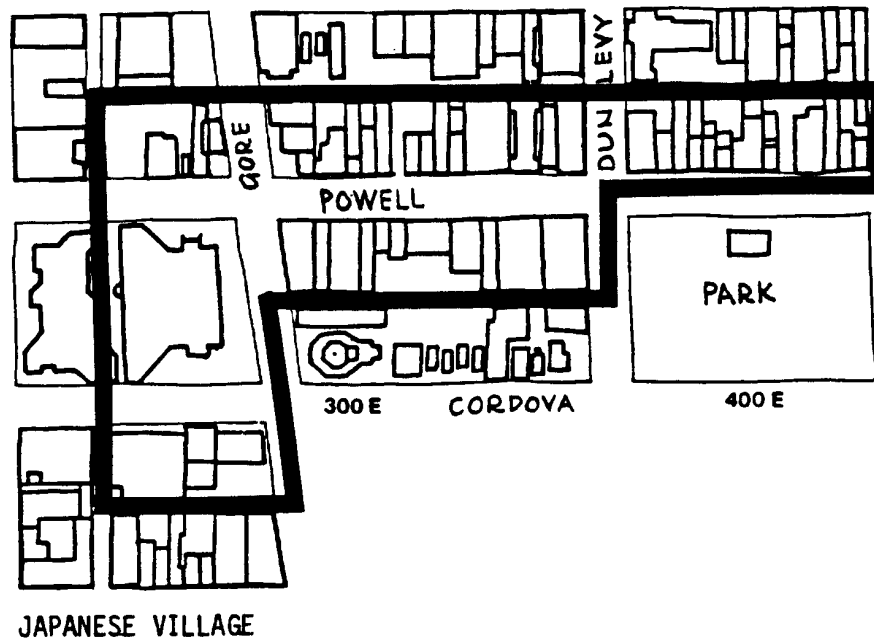
Encourage greater architectural cohesion of development fronting the park basing built form on dominant existing form of development.

- South Side:  
Three storey mansard type
- East Side:  
Gable to street, narrow frontage salt box with minimum front yard setbacks.
- West Side:  
Redevelopment should match east side.



**Residential Open Space:**

Discourage major street orientated private or semi-private open space except in the 600 Block Cordova Street, where average existing residential setbacks should be observed to maintain and replicate present character, or where such open space provides an appropriate setting for heritage development.

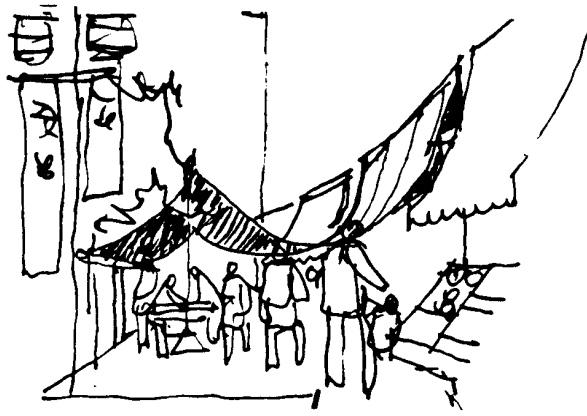


Present architectural character of the 200, 300 and 400 block Powell Street is not stylistically Japanese. The "Japanese Village" designation is a recognition of the historical concentration of the Japanese settlement in this area prior to the Second World War. Generally the lifestyle which flourished here, however, adopted and occasionally made subtle adaptations of the indigenous west coast architectural style of the day.

The adoption of a "Japanese Theme" for this area must recognize and respect the cultural merging which occurred and the area homogeneity which resulted.

Efforts to achieve a "Japanese Village" character should:

- 1) Encourage the location here of Japanese businesses, especially the food, beverage and Japanese orientated products and services.
- 2) Encourage Japanese styles of merchandising including greater use of the street for display and selling.
- 3) Encourage street design which supports the Japanese character; for instance, flowering street trees (cherry, magnolia, mulberry), special lighting lamp standards equipped to hang Japanese-type banners, ethnic signage, special types of awnings and weather protection, paving, etc.



**See Also Special Opportunity Gore Street in Sub-Area 1.**

**See Also Institutional Uses in Sub-Area 1.**

## 2.4 Sub-Area 4: Alexander/Powell: Issues/Opportunities



The major issue in this mixed use area stressing the integration of industrial and residential uses is the preservation of an adequate residential environment. (Refer to guideline on mixed uses.) Many of the older rooming houses are developed on a centre spine plan with provision for side yard light wells. (Refer to City of Vancouver "Guidelines for New Development Adjacent to Hotels and Rooming Houses.")

Since most housing occurs on the south side of Alexander new development should explore opportunities to maintain maximum sunlight to residential light wells and/or sideyard orientated suites by setting back while preserving facade continuity.

**See Also Special Opportunity Gore Street in Sub-Area 1.**

