



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

Planning, Urban Design and Sustainability Department

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GRANVILLE STREET (DOWNTOWN SOUTH) GUIDELINES

Adopted by City Council on July 30, 1991

Amended on September 8, 1998 and September 10, 2019

These guidelines are to be used in conjunction with a companion document entitled *A Design Handbook for Building Frontages on Granville Street*. Both documents should be referred to during the initial design stages for improvements and development to ensure the many aspirations of this important street are met.

In the event the Design Handbook conflicts with these guidelines, with the *Downtown Official Development Plan*, or with other City regulations, these guidelines and the regulations take precedent.

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Note: The guidelines in this report are generally organized under standardized headings. As a consequence, there are gaps in the numbering sequence where no guidelines apply.

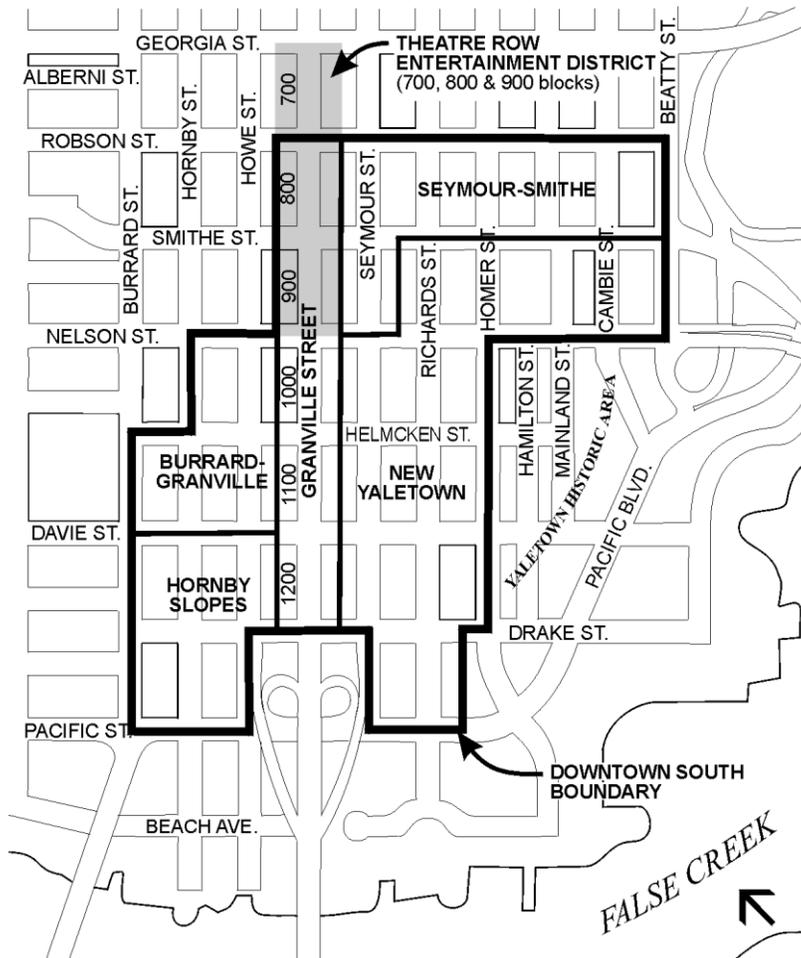
Application and Intent

These guidelines are to be used with the *Downtown Official Development Plan* for approval of uses or discretionary variation in regulations, within the 800 to 1200 blocks of Granville Street. The guidelines, along with the *Design Handbook for Building Frontages on Granville Street*, describe design opportunities and should assist designers of projects. They will also be used by City staff in the evaluation of development proposals.

The general intent of these guidelines is: to assist in the creation of a distinct urban character for Granville Street as an entertainment district for the city and as a pedestrian-oriented shopping area for Downtown South; to ensure a high standard of livability for residential projects and for the area as a whole; and, to ensure high quality development.

These guidelines apply to the Granville Street portion of the Downtown South planning area; that is the 800 to 1200 blocks of Granville as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Downtown South



Note: See *Downtown South Guidelines* for guidelines for Burrard-Granville, Hornby Slopes, and New Yaletown. For Seymour-Smithe, see guidelines and policies applicable to the Downtown District Sub-Area “C”.

2 General Design Considerations

2.1 Context

Granville Street has traditionally been a major retail street in Vancouver. In the blocks south of Robson Street, retail activity historically focused on the sale of musical instruments and related products, furniture and an eclectic mix of merchandise. The many theatres located there gave the 700 to 900 blocks the name “Theatre Row.” Hotels, particularly residential hotels, have also been a common land use from Robson Street to the Granville Bridge. Many of Granville Street’s heritage buildings are these older theatres and hotels.

A rejuvenation in street-oriented retailing in the downtown is bringing renewed interest to the area. Granville Street also continues to be a focus for entertainment, with prospects for new theatres, restaurants and nightclubs in the blocks designated as the “Theatre Row Entertainment District,” where the addition of new residential uses is not permitted.

Granville Street is also planned to become a major neighbourhood-serving commercial street, along with Davie Street, for the Downtown South and adjacent communities, providing such businesses as grocery stores, pharmacies and banks.

2.2 Heritage

Granville Street contains a number of buildings on the Vancouver Heritage Register which reinforce the character of the street with detailed facades (cornices, window sills, vertical pivot windows, brickwork, storefronts, theatre fronts, signs and marquees). These are important in the contribution they make to the general character of the street.

- (a) When developing a site with a heritage building, options for its retention should be explored. Various zoning relaxations, bonusing, and transfer-of-development-rights provisions exist for this purpose. Applicants should consult the *Heritage Policies and Guidelines* and the *Transfer of Density Policy and Procedure*; and
- (b) New development adjacent to historic buildings should respect their scale, massing, facade proportions and design.

2.3 Residential Livability

- (a) High quality residential livability should be achieved for all new dwelling units with regard for privacy, overlook, open space, safety and security, light and ventilation, and access and circulation.
- (b) Development sites on Granville Street are severely affected by noise, especially from vehicular traffic and from uses which generate a lot of noise, such as bars and cabarets.
 - (i) Appropriate design and construction techniques, which can be used to buffer residential units from noise, include:
 - orienting bedrooms away from noise sources (“deep units” will be considered which use borrowed light for the bedrooms);
 - using full mechanical ventilation (to provide an alternative to opening windows);
 - using concrete construction;
 - using glass block walls, or acoustically rated glazing;
 - using sound absorptive materials and sound barriers on balconies;
 - (ii) Residential developments near the Theatre Row Entertainment District should meet any applicable noise requirements that have been adopted by Council for the area.

4 Height, Setback, Parking and Daylight Access Guidelines

4.1 Height and Length

- (a) New buildings in the Granville Street area of Downtown South should provide for a continuous streetwall having a minimum of 30 feet in height at the property line fronting Granville Street. Recesses into the 30-foot streetwall will be considered for major entrance ways, provided the continuity of the streetwall is not compromised.
- (b) The maximum streetwall height should be 70 feet. Minor vertical projections, above the maximum streetwall height, will be considered for sculpted building elements and architectural appurtenances,

where these projections do not compromise basic building massing objectives for the street. In no case shall any projection exceed the maximum building height of 90 feet.

- (c) While generally a strong streetwall character is desired, setback of the upper portions of a building's facade, above the 30-foot minimum streetwall, may be considered to increase sun exposure to the street, to allow for mid-level terraces and to permit a building's form to reflect a change of use, such as to residential.
- (d) The streetwall element should contain retail at grade and otherwise contain commercial, hotel, residential, and/or related uses as permitted in the Official Development Plan.

For further discussion on streetwall treatments and upper-level setbacks consult *A Handbook for Building Frontages on Granville Street*.

4.2 Front Yard and Setbacks

No front yard setback is required on Granville Street. Lower portions of buildings should extend to the property line with a streetwall.

4.3 Side Yards and Setbacks

- (a) No exterior side yard setback should be provided on the Granville Street frontage.
- (b) No interior side yard setback should be provided, in order to ensure the desired continuous streetwall.

4.4 Rear Yard and Setbacks

- (a) For up to 30 feet in building height, no rear setback is required. Above 30 feet in height, a rear setback of at least 15 feet is required. Upper rear portions of a building may require greater setback to conform to the building envelope described in Section 4.1 of the *Downtown Official Development Plan*.
- (b) On a corner site a streetwall element of a minimum of 30 feet in height and a maximum of 70 feet in height should extend along the flanking street to the rear property line.
- (c) Treatment of the rear portions of buildings along Granville Street should respond sensitively to adjacent residential developments across the lane so as not to diminish the quality of enhancements to the lane environment. Landscaping should be provided where opportunities exist in rear setback areas, at grade and on roof decks.

4.5 Off-Street Parking and Loading

Parking structures have the potential to create blank walls on the public street, to present open parking to the lane, to unnecessarily increase the bulk of the building (because parking levels "at" grade are not counted in floor space ratio), and to compromise other uses of the site surface. Therefore:

- (a) Parking should be underground. Where on-grade parking is unavoidable, it should be located at the rear, and be covered and well screened with a roof or trellis.
- (b) Parking for commercial uses and visitors should be separate from residential parking, with security gates provided for the latter.
- (c) Parking ramps should also be covered and well screened with a roof or trellis.

Required headroom for loading can create spaces which present a dark concrete cavern with a ceiling of messy mechanical systems and glaring fluorescent lights to those across the lane. Therefore:

- (d) Except for those provided for one-storey buildings, all loading spaces should be solidly roofed to avoid noise and visual impacts on those above and fully gated with a grate or solid door. Negative impacts are to be avoided through appropriate height, lighting, painting, screening and enclosure.
- (e) In high-density projects, garbage facilities and recycling facilities should be provided underground or fully within the building, with provision made for moving bins to (or opening doors to) the lane only for pick-up. In smaller projects, where such arrangements may not be feasible, garbage and recycling facilities may be located adjacent to the lane, but should be fully enclosed on roof and sides, with screening to the lane to the degree possible.

4.6 Daylight Access to Habitable Rooms

- (a) Adequate daylight access to habitable rooms is critical to the livability of dwelling units.
 - (i) The distance of unobstructed view should not normally be less than 40 feet for living rooms and 20 feet for bedrooms and dens;
 - (ii) Additional overshadowing of windows by overhead balconies or other projections should be avoided. Overhead projections should be limited either in depth to 6 feet, or in width relative to the affected window;
 - (iii) Courtyards should conform to a height-to-width ratio of 2:1;
 - (iv) In cases where the height-to-width ratio of 2:1 cannot be achieved, then the upper storeys should be set back to permit the penetration of daylight into the courtyard.
- (b) For the purposes of section 4.6 (a), the following will not be considered as habitable rooms:
 - (i) bathrooms; and
 - (ii) kitchens, unless the floor area is greater than 10 percent of the total floor area of the dwelling unit, or 100 square feet, whichever is greater.
- (c) Relaxation of the provisions of section 4.6 (a) and (b) may be considered in cases of developments involving the retention and designation of a building listed on the Vancouver Heritage Register or involving the provision of low-income housing. For the purposes of relaxations, in no case should the minimum width of a courtyard be less than 20 feet.

5 Architectural Components

In general, the intent is for Granville Street developments to continue the tradition of creative architectural “expressionism” which characterizes Vancouver’s Downtown and West End. Therefore, rather than specifying particular materials, palettes, etc., the following guidelines deal with how the architectural aspects of the buildings should perform. *A Handbook for Building Frontages on Granville Street* should also be consulted for further elaboration of the ideas outlined here.

Maintaining Granville’s historic character is important. While new development should take its cues from the heritage buildings, it is equally important that it create a strong, fresh character of its own within the streetscape. New buildings should respect the massing, scale and quality of the heritage structures, but modern expressions and the use of non-traditional materials is encouraged.

Buildings at cross-streets have a role in highlighting these significant points in the streetscape. Buildings with important entrances should showcase them with signage, lighting, canopies and treatments that recall the outdoor lobbies of the theatres. Taller buildings should have fanciful tops that animate the upper reaches of the streetscape while maintaining their own unique quality, and the scale and massing of the street.

For the sake of simplicity, in this and following sections the “front” of a site will be deemed to be the edge abutting Granville Street regardless of whether the site dimension on that side is less than the dimension on the flanking street.

5.1 Roofs

- (a) The upper portions of buildings should contribute to the streetscape, either through the incorporation of decorative roof “caps” or cornice elements, or through the sculpting of the upper floors. Signage and architectural appurtenances protruding above the roofline will be considered.
- (b) Architectural appurtenances not containing floor area may extend 3.6 feet (1.1 m) above the building height limit. Section 10.18 of the Zoning Bylaw describes height relaxation provisions that apply for architectural appurtenances.
- (c) Low- and mid-rise building roofs should be designed to be attractive as seen from above through landscaping, screening elements, and/or choice of roofing material and colour.
- (d) Vents, mechanical rooms and equipment, elevator penthouses, etc. should be integrated into the roof architectural treatment or should be screened with materials and finishes compatible with the building.

For further discussion on the treatment of the upper portions of buildings consult *A Handbook for Building Frontages on Granville Street*.

5.3 Entrances

Entrances animate the streets, and create identity and a sense of address for buildings, dwelling units and stores.

Commercial and Residential Uses

- (a) Commercial and residential entries to buildings should be separately identifiable. On corner sites residential entries should be located on the side frontage, where feasible.
- (b) Commercial entries to buildings should be on Granville Street except in cases where there are more than one commercial uses or businesses on the ground floor. In such cases, additional entrances may be located on the side frontage.
- (c) Entrances should be enhanced through the use of elements such as special paving, recessed doorways, window displays, special planting features, permanent canopies projecting from the building, special lighting and custom signage.
- (d) Individualized entries to retail, restaurant and service establishments should be provided immediately off the street. In multi-tenant buildings, individualized design treatment should be given to each business to create greater interest and variation at the street level.
- (e) Entrances to significant buildings, such as theatres, entertainment complexes and multi-level retail establishments, should be given a distinct treatment which may take the form of more elaborate signage tied into the architecture, or a recessed double-height entry space potentially giving access to several levels. The design and scale of recessed entries should complement, rather than detract from, the lively pedestrian-oriented retail experience of the street.

For further elaboration on entrance treatments consult *A Handbook for Building Frontages on Granville Street*.

5.4 Balconies

- (a) Balconies should be designed as an integrated part of the building rather than appearing “tacked on.”
- (b) Balconies may be enclosed (e.g. for acoustic purposes), subject to Council-adopted guidelines.

5.5 Exterior Walls and Finishing

5.5.1 Lower Floors of Buildings

The front, lower floors of buildings form part of the streetscape, and are important in shaping the public realm and pedestrian character of streets. The required streetwall created by low- and mid-rise building elements will contain commercial, hotel, or residential uses consistent with the *Downtown Official Development Plan* (see Section 4). The streetwall is intended to play an important role in making the high-density development and busy streets more human and intimate, in both scale and activity.

- (a) Devices such as cornice lines, a change in material, and changes in fenestration scale should be used to achieve a comfortable pedestrian scale at lower levels.
- (b) Richer materials, more intensive decorative details and lighting should be used to enhance the “close up” view of the pedestrian. In the case of retail uses, display windows, lighting, outdoor display and continuous weather protection should be incorporated.
- (c) Commercial uses located on the lower floors should present a pedestrian scale and image in treatment and detailing, avoiding large expanses of glass, mirrored surfaces, etc. In general, pedestrians should be able to easily discern the nature of the business through facade design, window displays and glazing that permits visual access into the premises.
- (d) Metal bars or grating are discouraged as security devices. If used they should be designed as decorative elements or located discretely behind display areas.

For further discussion on streetwall treatments consult *A Handbook for Building Frontages on Granville Street*.

5.5.2 Interior Sidewalls

While the creation of large expanses of blank sidewall should be avoided, there will be cases where sidewalls will be exposed to neighbouring properties, either on a temporary or permanent basis. This

may occur where an existing building already has created a sidewall, or because different forms of development are abutting one another.

- (a) Interior sidewalls should be designed to be attractive to neighbouring developments and passers-by through the use of quality materials, colours, textures, articulation, and/or landscaping such as climbing and hanging plants.

Historically, interior sidewalls have been used on Granville Street for painted signage and advertising, particularly on the hotel buildings. While this form of advertising is not encouraged, opportunities exist on the sidewalls to animate the streetscape and restore the street's former vibrancy through the use of murals and wall art.

- (b) Consideration will be given to the addition of murals and artwork on interior sidewalls provided that the work meets the requirements of the Sign By-law and abides by Council-adopted regulations and guidelines for murals.

For further examples of sidewall treatments consult *A Handbook for Building Frontages on Granville Street*.

5.5.3 Lane Edges

The vehicular and service access function of the lanes is primary. However, they will also be very important elements in the visual image for the area for the hundreds of residents who travel down them to enter their buildings' parking garages, and who will look out or down at them as part of the "semi-private" interior space of their blocks, as part of their "backyards."

Surface parking is discouraged on the lanes and should be enclosed and/or fully screened. The treatment of loading and garbage facilities is to be carefully considered (see Section 4.5). However, beyond this, the architecture and landscape design of the development must extend to deal with the lane as an integral component of the project, with lane facades and landscape treated positively.

- (a) Building walls abutting the lane should be fully designed and made attractive to neighbouring developments and passers-by through articulation and use of quality materials and finishes.
- (b) Landscape material should be incorporated in the projects adjacent to the lane through provision of space, soil depth and irrigation (as necessary) for climbing plants, hanging plants, and/or shrubs and trees of suitable growing habit.

5.5.4 Colour and Materials

- (a) A broad range of colours is encouraged. Lively colours that reflect the entertainment aspect of the street should be used liberally. However, because of Vancouver's often subdued or grey daylight, as well as the shadowing impacts of high density development in the area, extensive use of dark colours is discouraged.
- (b) New buildings should reflect the durability and rich articulation of Granville Street's past, either through a palette of traditional materials or modern ones. Glazed brick, mosaic tile, rusticated terra cotta elements and decorative metal cornices are all materials that contribute to the character of Granville's existing buildings. Lasting materials like stone, brick and concrete are encouraged, as well as glass and metal. New development need not match adjacent or nearby existing buildings, but should be designed to ensure visual compatibility.
- (c) An inventive, sculptural use of metal in the form of railings, screens and secondary structural elements (e.g. support brackets) will be considered. Decorative building elements are encouraged but should be designed with permanence in mind.

For further discussion on colours and materials consult *A Handbook for Building Frontages on Granville Street*.

5.5.5 Retail Frontages

- (a) Small, individual store frontages should be provided. The typical 25-foot retail bay should not be exceeded wherever possible to preserve the fine-grained, ground-level frontage that contributes to

a sense of pedestrian comfort and variety. Where a large tenancy is planned, it is desirable to locate the majority of its area behind smaller frontages.

- (b) Storefronts have a significant role to play in the Granville streetscape, reinforcing the entertainment district and local commercial roles at close range. Individualized tenancy design should be used to enhance pedestrian interest. Window displays, security, lighting, signage, canopies, and entries should all be designed to provide colourful, attractive and creative compositions that uniquely showcase each business and result in a richer streetscape with highly diverse storefronts.

For further elaboration on retail frontage treatments consult *A Handbook for Building Frontages on Granville Street*.

5.6 Awnings, Canopies, Recesses and Arcades

Historically on Granville Street, retractable canvas awnings were typical for storefronts and restaurants. Major entrances, such as hotels, had heavy canopies supported by angled brackets mounted in the building facade. Theatres had more elaborate canopies incorporating marquee signage and supported by large structural framework. Minor recessed entrances were common for retail frontages, usually with extensive display windows, while theatres had major recessed entryways, often incorporating box offices. Arcades were not commonly used.

Awnings, canopies and suitably designed recesses are encouraged for Granville to reinforce the street's historic character, and to provide comfortable and interesting spaces for pedestrians.

- (a) Continuous weather protection is required on Granville, in the form of awnings or canopies. These should be of appropriate depth and height to shelter outdoor display and seating, as well as to provide a protected walking space. They should extend 6 to 10 feet out from the building facade and not be higher than 10 feet above the sidewalk at their outside edge.
- (b) Generally, for major developments, permanent canopies are preferred to vinyl or fabric ones. Design should reflect the building's architectural style and consideration be given to integrating signage and lighting. Permanent canopies should be as translucent as possible to maximize natural light at the ground level.
- (c) Retractable awnings will be considered in appropriate situations, such as small shop and restaurant frontages, to allow for the "opening up" of the street during times of good weather. At all other times, retractable awnings will be expected to provide the required weather protection.
- (d) More elaborate canopies will be considered for major entrances, such as for theatres and multi-tenant complexes. Such canopies may be integrated with the architecture of the building and incorporate projecting signs and marquees.
- (e) Recessed entrances may be considered for storefronts, theatres and entrances to major buildings. Recesses should not compromise the continuity of the streetwall. They should be designed to be safe, well lit and visible, with crime prevention principles in mind. Facades with arcades are not suitable for Granville Street.

For further discussion on awnings, canopies and recesses consult *A Handbook for Building Frontages on Granville Street*.