

Guidelines

Public Views Guidelines

Approved by Council on July 10, 2024



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The City of Vancouver acknowledges that it is situated on the unceded traditional territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam Indian Band), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish Nation), and səliłwətał (Tseil-Waututh Nation).

1 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Vancouver is known internationally as a modern, cosmopolitan city set against the spectacular backdrop of the North Shore Mountains. As people move through the city and along the seawall, the views to the mountains past the dense downtown skyline act as a reminder of the connection to nature that has become foundational to Vancouver's cultural identity, and part of what attracts people to live, work and visit here. These views, along with views of some important landmark buildings, contribute to a meaningful sense of place that helps set Vancouver apart.

In 1989, City Council resolved to shape development in Vancouver's downtown and central neighbourhoods to support economic growth and housing supply while also preserving landmark views for future generations to enjoy. In addition to other regulations governing building height, density and massing, Council adopted protected public views from various locations along the False Creek seawall and at points in outlying areas.

In the decades following, the views have evolved to better respond to the changing urban context, with the most substantial amendments made in 1990, 2011 and 2024. These Council-approved changes have included relocation of view origin points, repeal of protected views, addition of new views, reshaping of view cone boundaries and relaxation criteria. At the conclusion of the Downtown Skyline Study in 1997, Council directed staff to develop strategies to shape the city's skyline into a distinguishable 'dome' shape, including subsequent amendments to the public views. Subsequently, Council adopted the Higher Buildings Policy to establish a specialized, rigorous process by which select developments may be permitted to encroach into public view 3 (Queen Elizabeth Park) and other views identified in specific policies.

2 APPLICATION AND INTENT

These guidelines are intended to be used in conjunction with all other applicable policies and guidelines for developments seeking approval through rezoning or development permit, and which are located on sites within the view cone boundaries of a Council-approved public view. It includes criteria by which the Higher Buildings Policy may be extended to qualifying sites and select protected public views that those developments may be permitted to encroach into.

Protected public views are comprised of three parts: an origin point, view cone(s), and view subject(s). A view origin point is a specific location within an accessible, public place from which an obstructed view to the view subject(s) is secured. A view cone is the technical tool used to locate where and how development should be shaped to ensure that the view remains sufficiently protected. View cones are made up of two vertical boundaries that define the spread of the view cone and a horizontal lower boundary that establishes the maximum geodetic height permitted. When a development proposal intersects with a view cone, all parts of the building are expected to be located outside of the view cone boundaries to mitigate the risk that the protected views are sequentially compromised.

Table 1 lists the Council-approved protected public views, including origin point locations and view subjects. View cone scope and locations are mapped in the City's VanMap application which should be consulted first to determine the applicability of these guidelines to a development parcel. The City's Open Data Portal contains GIS data which may be used to determine the compliant three-dimensional massing parameters of a development site.

3 GUIDELINES

3.1 Protected Public Views

The following table lists the protected public views:

Table 1: Public Views

Reference	Origin Point	Subject	Date Approved
A – Alder Terrace	Seawall below Alder Terrace	Mount Seymour	1989 (Amended 2024)
B1 – Charleson Seawall	Charleson Seawall below Charleson Park	Ch'ich'iyúy Elxwíkn (the 'Two Sisters' or the 'Lions') Lions	1989
B2 – Charleson Seawall	Charleson Seawall below Charleson Park	Crown/Grouse and Hotel Vancouver roof	1989 (Amended 1990)
D – Heather Bay	Water's Edge at Leg-in-Boot Square	Ch'ich'iyúy Elxwíkn (the 'Two Sisters' or the 'Lions')	1989
E – Cambie Bridge	Cambie Bridge at the False Creek Seawall pedestrian stair	Mount Seymour	1989 (Amended 2024)
G1 – Olympic Shipyard Pier	North End of Pier to the west of the Canoe Bridge	North Shore Mountains	2011 (Amended 2024)
G2 – Olympic Shipyard Pier	North End of Pier to the west of the Canoe Bridge	North Shore Mountains	2011 (Amended 2024)

Reference	Origin Point	Subject	Date Approved
H – Olympic Village Plaza	Centre of the stage in Olympic Village Plaza	North Shore Mountains	2011
J1 – Creekside Park	On the pedestrian path at the north end of the Creekside Park lawn at the north pillar	Ch'ích'iyúy Elxwíkn (the 'Two Sisters' or the 'Lions')	2011 (Amended 2024)
J2 – Creekside Park	On the pedestrian path at the north end of the Creekside Park lawn at the north pillar	North Shore Mountains	2011 (Amended 2024)
K – Drake Street	Seawall near Drake Street the Canoe Bridge	City Hall	2023
3.2.1 – Queen Elizabeth Park	Viewing Platform	North Shore Mountains	1989
3.2.2 – Queen Elizabeth Park	Viewing Platform	North Shore Mountains	1989
3.2.3 – Queen Elizabeth Park	Viewing Platform	North Shore Mountains	1989
3.2.4 – Queen Elizabeth Park	Viewing Platform	North Shore Mountains	1989
9.1 – Cambie Street	Cambie Street at the Walking Figures plaza behind Broadway-City Hall Station	Ch'ích'iyúy Elxwíkn (the 'Two Sisters' or the 'Lions')	1989 (Amended 1990, 2024)
9.2 – Cambie Street	Cambie Street at the Walking Figures plaza behind Broadway-City Hall Station	North Shore Mountains	1989 (Amended 1990, 2024)
10 – Granville Island	At the west side of the Granville Island Seawall	Hollyburn Mountain	1989

Reference	Origin Point	Subject	Date Approved
	north of the False Creek Ferries dock		
12.2 – Granville Bridge	At the mid-point of the bridge on the east pedestrian path	Mount Seymour	1989 (Amended 2011, 2024)
20 – Granville Street	Granville Street at W Broadway	North Shore Mountains	1989 (Amended 2024)
21 – Commercial Drive	Commercial Drive at E Broadway	North Shore Mountains	1989 (Amended 2024)
22 – Main Street	At the Mt. Pleasant Clock at Main Street and Kingsway	North Shore Mountains	1989 (Amended 2024)
27.1 – Trout Lake	South Shore of Trout Lake	North Shore Mountains	1989
27.2 – Trout Lake	South Shore of Trout Lake	Ch'ích'iyúy Elxwíkn (the 'Two Sisters' or the 'Lions')	1989

3.2 Building Height and Massing

- 3.1.1 Development sites located within protected public views should be designed so that no part of the building, including appurtenances, encroach into the boundaries of the relevant view cone(s).
- 3.1.2 Minor encroachments into a view cone boundary may be considered for building elements that contribute to the safety and usability of common rooftop outdoor amenity areas (e.g., glass guardrails, small open pergolas and play structures), rooftop vegetation and climate adaptation technologies (e.g., solar panels, photovoltaic panels).

Encroachments should not compromise the legibility of the primary focal point of the public view (e.g., the peak and/or immediate profile line of the subject mountain, the neon clock of Vancouver City Hall, etc.).

- 3.1.3 Encroachments, except for rooftop vegetation, should be comprised of low-profile or translucent materials to mitigate their visibility from the public view origin point (e.g., glass guardrails, matte anodized aluminum posts, perforated sun shades/louvers, etc.).
- 3.1.4 Common rooftop amenity elements, such as tensile shade structures and pergolas, should be fully open at the sides for any part that encroaches into a public view cone boundary.
- 3.1.5 Building elements encroaching into a public view cone boundary, except for rooftop vegetation, should be absolutely minimized except where a more stringent requirement or hardship can be demonstrated. In this instance, the encroachment should be limited no greater than 2 m (6.5 ft.).

3.3 View Shadows

- 3.3.1 Existing encroachments into public view cone boundaries may result in obstructions to the view or a 'view shadow.' This creates an area in front of and/or behind the encroachment which may be considered compromised.
- 3.3.2 Minor encroachments into a view shadow are generally discouraged. However, they will be considered when a limited impact to the view is demonstrated. Vegetation or minor encroachments as outlined in section 3.1 should not be considered as creating a view shadow.
- 3.3.3 New building elements proposed within a view shadow should align with the profile of the existing encroachments when views from the public view origin point. Additional minor encroachments outside of the profile of a view shadow, as outlined above, are not supported.
- 3.3.4 Encroachments from landmark buildings (e.g., the crown of the Hotel Vancouver in public view B2 – Charleson Seawall) are considered a part of the protected public view, and view shadow relaxations may only be considered for sites located behind that existing building.

3.4 Exceptional Downtown Sites

There are select major development sites in the downtown with the potential to contribute to strategic and transformative city-building, playing an instrumental role in the continued evolution of Vancouver's downtown peninsula as a great place to live, work, visit and play. Rezoning proposals that meet the criteria below in addition to those set out in the Higher Buildings Policy (except for 2.1(b)) may be considered as Exceptional Downtown Sites and should follow the enhanced approvals process of that policy.

- 3.4.1 Parcels should have a minimum contiguous site area of 8,000 sq. m (1.98 acres).
- 3.4.2 In addition to public view 3 (Queen Elizabeth Park), qualifying developments may be permitted to encroach into public views B1 (Charleson Seawall), B2 (Charleson Seawall), D (Heather Bay) and 12.2 (Granville Bridge).

- 3.4.3 As required, developments should be shaped to maintain existing views to Ch'ích'iyúy Elxwíkn (the 'Two Sisters' or the 'Lions').
- 3.4.4 Sites should be located in areas with Council-adopted policies enabling mixed-use rezoning applications, and comply with policy requirements for residential tenancy including affordable housing, service and commercial uses, and hotel and office space.
- 3.4.5 Community amenity space, institutional and cultural uses are also strongly encouraged to be included as part of the development.
- 3.4.6 Proposals should demonstrate an innovative approach to site planning, public realm design and interfacing with the existing context. Proposals should provide, in part, substantial publicly accessible open spaces, strategies to expand the urban tree canopy and features that work in concert with the building programs to generate a range of pedestrian-oriented experiences.
- 3.4.7 Qualifying developments should demonstrate leadership in architectural and sustainable design, with all site and building design elements reflecting a cohesive, innovative concept. Particular consideration should be given to lower building levels that define the pedestrian realm, and tower crowns which will become visible elements of the downtown skyline.
- 3.4.8 Applications that advance the City's UNDRIP strategy as a City of Reconciliation are highly encouraged.