



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

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

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# **RM-6 WEST END GEORGIA/ALBERNI GUIDELINES**

*Adopted by City Council on June 20 and September 26, 1989  
Amended July 20, 2022*

# Contents

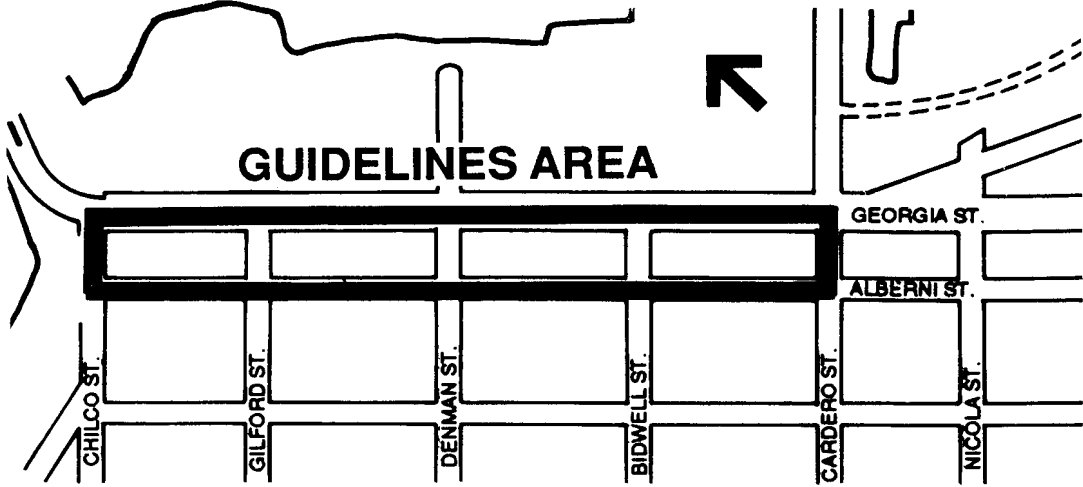
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**1. Application and Intent**

These guidelines are to be used with applicable regulations of the Zoning and Development By-law for approval of conditional approval uses or discretionary variances in regulations within a particularly sensitive area of the West End between Georgia, Alberni, Chilco, and Cardero Streets. The guidelines describe design opportunities. As well as assisting designers of projects, the guidelines will be used by City staff in evaluation of proposals.

The general intent is to assist in creating an urban character of distinction for this important city entry and exit; to ensure highest quality projects; and to enhance the liveability and diversity of the West End.

Figure 1.



**2. General Design Considerations**

**2.1 Neighbourhood Character**

The West End is a high-density, mature residential community. Its character results from a variety of old and new, high and low buildings, incremental development and established landscaping and street trees.

- (a) The large properties between Georgia and Alberni should continue to reflect this neighbourhood characteristic in any development while providing a “formal” character for Georgia Street.

**2.2 Street Character**

**General**

The character of the streets contributes significantly to the West End's image. The mature street trees and lush landscaping of the front yards are major elements in creating the character. The variety of building types that can be found in a block co-exist because the streetscape ties them together.

This area is located at a main point of entry to both the city and Stanley Park. The street character on Georgia Street must reflect this important location. Developments on the 1600 to 1900 blocks between Georgia and Alberni must therefore incorporate a dual character into their design. The Georgia face of these developments must address the formal character of Georgia Street while their Alberni face must maintain a West End character.

## **Alberni Street**

- (a) Alberni Street should be established with a West End character Street. New development facing Alberni should be relatively continuous, comprised of a combination of low structures (two to four storeys) set back from Alberni, and slim towers centred between north and south property lines.
- (b) Buildings should be separated and have architectural treatments that are distinct but compatible.

## **Georgia Street**

- (c) Georgia Street should be developed as a distinctive formal street. The composition of high- and mid-rise towers, green courts and street landscaping on each of the 1600 to 1900 blocks should create a strong and unified image for the street.
- (d) Properties on the south side of Georgia Street should develop substantial landscaped “green courts” in order to create visual continuity. Architectural details within landscaped areas such as retaining walls and balustrades should allude to traditional detailing found in Stanley Park.
- (e) Private projects should contribute to achieving an ordered, continuous streetscape.

### **2.3 Orientation**

The alignment of building faces with the orthogonal street grid is one of the main ordering principles in the West End and Downtown overall built form.

- (a) New development built form should respect the orthogonal street grid. Any non-orthogonal elements should be clearly subordinate.

### **2.4 Views**

The area contains important public and private views. Public views to and from Stanley Park, to and from Coal Harbour and long views to the North Shore mountains are important amenities along Georgia Street as people arrive and leave the city. These views will establish the character of the entry experience to the city. Street-end views to Coal Harbour and the North Shore are also significant.

Impact of new development on private views is a contentious issue in the West End generally. In this area the opportunity exists to marry development interests with view preservation through the use of predominantly tall, slim towers. Views northward in general are important, but of particular importance is the view looking over Coal Harbour, toward Brockton Oval and Grouse Mountain beyond.

- (a) New development should minimize its impact on existing views and distribute these impacts as equitably as possible. New developments should provide attractive near views for existing development when distant views cannot be preserved. A view analysis should be provided for each new development.
- (b) Each of the 1600 to 1900 blocks should provide at least one public view slot at pedestrian level (+/-20 feet wide) from Alberni Street northward into the ““green court”” and if possible to Coal Harbour and mountains.

## 2.5 Topography

The topography of the area slopes both in a north/south and east/west direction.

- (a) Development and parking structures should be stepped to minimize blank retaining walls on Georgia Street and Alberni Street, particularly at the northwest corners of blocks. (Refer also to section 8.1 of these guidelines).
- (b) Entrances to buildings on the 1600 to 1900 blocks of Georgia Street should be off Alberni Street, the high side of the site. These entrances should be at the same level as the sidewalk or be connected by a gradual transition of grade to prevent a “pit-like” condition.

## 2.6 Light and Ventilation

Natural light and ventilation are essential to residential liveability. Light access to units can be a problem when they are partially below grade resulting in dark, and in some cases, damp living conditions.

- (a) If a unit is lower than the adjoining street grade because of a sloping site, the surrounding sloped area should be configured to permit more light to reach the unit.

## 2.7 Weather

The generally anticipated level of pedestrian traffic in the area is low and the uses mainly residential. One exception to this condition is along Denman Street (leading eventually to Coal Harbour) where retail continuity is desired.

- (a) Continuous weather protection from the rain should be provided along both sides of Denman Street, in the form of awnings or canopies.

## 2.8 Noise

The study area is severely affected by noise by heavy vehicular arterial traffic moving through the area. For new development, the impact of noise must be recognized and minimized to the greatest extent possible to ensure acceptable residential liveability. The sloping sites and “green courts” in the area can potentially be used to advantage by installing terracing and low retaining walls which tend to deflect some direct tire noise.

- (a) All residential buildings should meet acoustic standards for noise within buildings and between buildings and the outside environment as set by Section 10.2 of the Zoning and Development By-law.
- (b) Careful attention should be given to providing a good quality acoustic environment. The following list provides some indication of possible means of noise attenuation:
  - using concrete construction;
  - orienting outdoor areas and bedrooms away from noise sources;
  - utilizing glass block walls, or acoustically rated glazing;
  - using alternate ventilation (to minimize opening windows); and
  - managing interior noise levels (e.g. use of sound reducing materials).

## **2.9 Privacy**

Privacy problems will be generated by heavy vehicular traffic (and headlights) as well as by pedestrians passing by. In addition problems of overlooking of private deck and patio space can also occur.

- (a) New development should mitigate any impacts on privacy enjoyed by adjacent residents and should ensure that adequate privacy for new units is provided through setbacks, landscaping and screening in conformity with other guidelines in this document.

## **2.10 Safety and Security**

Safety is a key component of livability. New development must provide a secure environment.

- (a) Underground parking facilities should meet the standards contained in the administrative bulletin, Parking and Loading Design Supplement.
- (b) Appropriate residential lighting should be provided on site to ensure good visibility of access routes and landscaped areas without over-spill to neighbours.
- (c) Lobbies should be visible from the street.

## **2.11 Access and Circulation**

Traditionally, pedestrian access to buildings in the West End has been from a single, prominent entrance. The original houses provided access from a single stairway leading from the street. Most apartments provide access from a central lobby.

The “green courts” provided on Georgia Street blocks are primarily a visual amenity rather than for public use. Given the continuity of the conventional West End street grid through the area and the light volumes of pedestrian traffic, cross-block circulation for the public, while possible, is not considered necessary.

Vehicular access to parking garages traditionally is off lanes or streets. Access to blocks fronting Georgia Street is limited due to the fact that there are no lanes and access to parking is not permitted off Georgia.

- (a) The number of walkway access points to building entries from the street should be limited to avoid breaking front yards into small, discontinuous pieces of open space.
- (b) Vehicular access to 1600 to 1900 blocks Georgia Street should be from Alberni Street. Access should not occur off north/south streets in order that they be preserved for potential future mini-parks (Gilford and Chilco Street) or traffic connector (Bidwell Street) or traffic signal line-ups (Cardero Street).
- (c) In and out “drop-off” driveways are generally not desirable. They should be considered only for development on sites 300 feet or longer with a sufficient number of units and sufficient traffic conflict to necessitate this provision. Where provided they should be paved and landscaped to the highest standards, consistent with the rest of the project and the intent of the guidelines in this document to establish a residential character on Alberni Street. (Note that separate guidelines on this topic may result from future study. Applicants should enquire for the latest criteria.)
- (d) The visual impacts of parking ramps should be minimized by proper treatment. This might include ramps enclosed by structures or integrating ramp locations with slot views

through properties. In all cases, ramps should be treated with high quality finishes and landscaping.

### **3. Uses**

From a locational and amenity perspective, the best primary land use in this area is residential. Retail viability is limited (to Denman Street mainly) and while other commercial uses may be supported, very careful design must ensure their integration into the characters prescribed in these guidelines for Georgia and Alberni Streets.

- (a) The primary land use in developments in the area should be residential. However, non-residential land uses, as described below, may be permitted and may be suitable especially to low-rise development required on Alberni Street.
- (b) Hotel use is not desirable west of Denman Street, but may be considered east of Denman Street depending on meeting all guidelines in this document.
- (c) Social, recreational and (non-commercial) cultural amenities, both for project residents or for the public, may be considered.
- (d) Retail and restaurant uses are required along the Denman Street frontage. They may be located elsewhere if desired, but are not required.
- (e) Other types of small-scale commercial use may be permitted, particularly along Alberni Street east of Denman Street, with special attention to ensure their compatibility in type, scale, and design with these guidelines.

### **4. Guidelines Pertaining to the Regulations of the Zoning and Development By-law**

#### **4.1 Frontage**

The opportunity exists to create a more active and urban pedestrian environment along Denman Street, eventually all the way to Coal Harbour.

- (a) Shop fronts should be limited to a maximum width of 50 feet (15.2 metres), with a smaller average preferred.

#### **4.2 Building Height (and Length)**

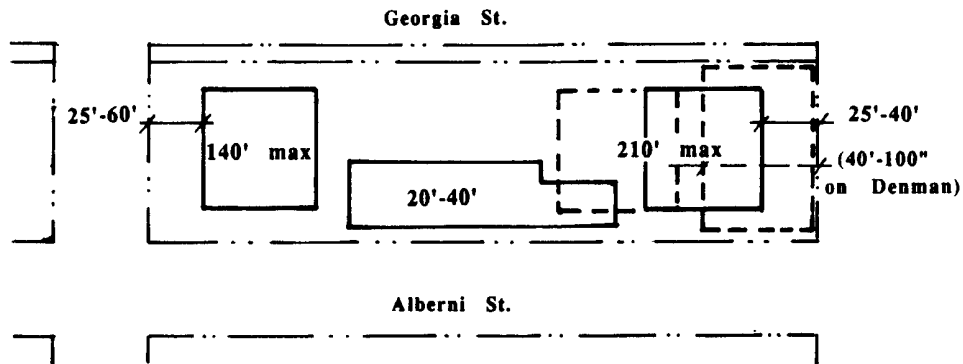
A variety of building heights characterizes the West End built form. It is important that despite the large property ownerships in this area, this pattern of diversity continue. However, in order to achieve a formal order suitable to Georgia Street, the massing for the 1600 to 1900 blocks should form a repetitive rhythm.

The importance of private view preservation makes the use of slim towers appropriate.

- (a) On the 1600 to 1900 blocks Georgia Street, the same general pattern should be followed:
  - A single tall (maximum 210 feet high) tower on the easterly end (approximately centred between north and south property lines);
  - A single mid-rise (maximum 140 feet high) building or tower on the westerly end (approximately centred between north and south property lines); and

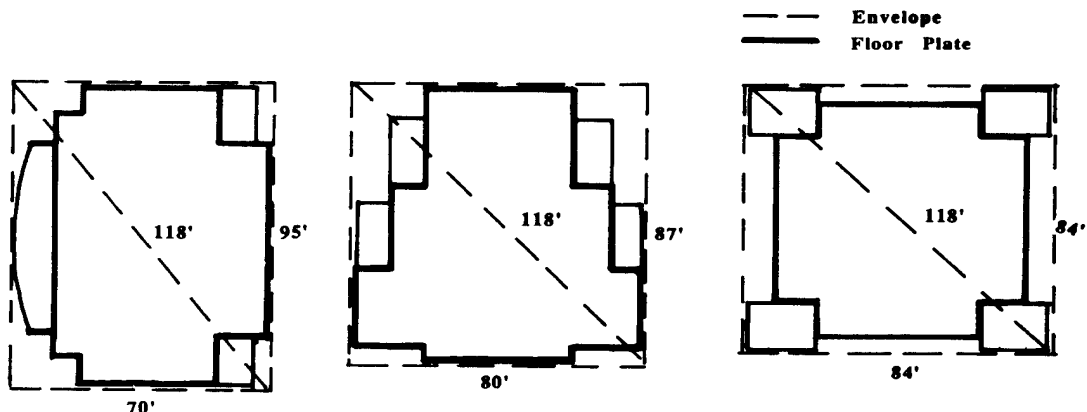
- Low-rise (minimum 20 feet, maximum 40 feet high) building(s) between the two taller forms, located on the Alberni Street side of the block.
- (b) On the 1900 block Georgia, the pattern described above should be modified to incorporate an approximately 50 to 60 foot building mass continuously along the Chilco Street edge to maintain the moderate scale to the Park edge and to accommodate the single separate 33 foot lot.
- (c) On the 1700 to 1800 blocks Georgia Street, the pattern described above should be modified to incorporate a low-rise massing along the Denman at the property line (minimum 20 feet, maximum 40 feet high) extending back from Denman a minimum of 40 feet.

Figure 2. Typical Block Massing



- (d) The taller towers should have distinctive roof forms.
- (e) In order to maintain slimness of both high- and mid-rise towers, floor plates above 40 feet above grade shall be limited:
  - maximum floor plate of approximately 5,500 square feet (not counting balconies normally excluded from floor space ratio calculation, but including elevator cores etc.); and
  - maximum diagonal dimension of the tower “envelope” (the rectangle containing the total floor plate including balconies) of 118 feet.

Figure 3. Floor Plate Limits





#### **4.3 Front Yard (and Setback)**

**Note:** Setbacks on Georgia Street are measured from the future property line, 3.5 metres in from existing property lines.

The front yard is the most public aspect of a site. Its treatment strongly influences streetscape character and how the building is seen from the street. In this area, front yards should contribute to the “greening” character of the area on both Alberni and Georgia Street.

- (a) Minimum setback along Georgia Street should be 10 feet for the mid- and high-rise buildings. An additional + 5 feet would be desirable as extra space for tree crowns is not essential. Minimum setback is 40 feet for the low-rise buildings (to create the “green courts”).
- (b) Minimum setback from Alberni for all structures should be 12 feet. This may be reduced where commercial uses are incorporated on the Alberni frontage.
- (c) To insure approximately equal spacing of tall towers on the 1600 to 1900 block of Georgia Street, the high-rise towers should be setback from easterly flanking streets (Cardero, Bidwell and Gilford), a minimum of 25 feet and a maximum of 40 feet. The setback from Denman Street on the 1800 block should be 40 feet minimum, 100 feet maximum to allow for retail development. Low-rise building may occur in these setbacks.
- (d) The mid-rise towers should be set back from the westerly flanking streets (Bidwell and Gilford) a minimum of 25 feet and a maximum of 60 feet. The setback from Denman Street on the 1700 block should be a minimum of 40 feet and maximum of 80 feet to allow for retail development. Low-rise buildings may occur in these setbacks.
- (e) The tower positioning should be manipulated within the above requirements to preserve neighbours' views as much as possible.

#### **4.4 Side Yards (and Setbacks)**

For the 1600 to 1900 blocks of Georgia, there should be no pre-set minimum side yard. The individual building masses should be separated however. Where two separately-owned sites share an internal property line, adequate space should be provided depending on development anticipated on the adjacent site.

#### **4.5 Rear Yards (and Setbacks)**

As noted in section 4.3 of these guidelines above, the sites on the 1600 to 1900 Georgia are not deemed to have “rears”.

#### **4.6 Site Coverage**

For the 1600 to 1900 blocks of Georgia, a maximum site coverage is not necessary because building massing and setbacks are stringent.

#### **4.7 Off-Street Parking and Loading**

The 1600 to 1900 blocks between Georgia and Alberni are not serviced by lanes, unlike the majority of the West End. In order to create the “greening” character for the area, very little site area should be devoted to parking and loading functions.

- (a) Parking should be provided underground. On lots 50 feet or less in width, above ground parking may be considered and exempted from floor space ratio if enclosed.
- (b) Access for parking and service loading should be from Alberni Street.
- (c) Access points should present an attractive appearance using high quality materials (such as paving stones or brick) and landscaping.
- (d) Parking garage doors should screen garage interiors.
- (e) Porte cocheres and “drop-off” driveways, where permitted, should be attractively designed with the highest quality materials. (Refer to section 2.11(c) of these guidelines).

## **4.8 External Design**

One of the characteristics which makes the West End unique is the close juxtaposition of tall and low buildings, each with a distinctive architectural character. The collective developments on the 1600 and 1900 block Georgia need to strike a balance between diversity and similarity. Perceived from Georgia Street, they need to reflect a greater degree of similarity, while from Alberni Street they need to reflect a greater degree of diversity.

The degree of similarity between projects as perceived from Georgia Street will be largely a function of their repetitive massing and consistent landscape treatment.

- (a) Each separate building (high-, mid- and low-rise) should be treated somewhat differently so that the large site developments are perceived as harmonious but not as block-long “projects”. Variation of colour, materials, fenestration and architectural treatment (within the broad limits set below) is appropriate.
- (b) Within a single building, all faces will be visible and should be finished and detailed to a consistent high standard.
- (c) Buildings at certain identified focal point opportunities should respond through the incorporation of special forms. These locations are the Chilco/Georgia Streets corner, Denman/Georgia corner, and Cardero/Georgia corner (on axis with Pender Street).

## **5. Architectural Components**

### **5.1 Roofs**

The number of higher buildings in the West End makes roofs of lower developments very visible. Also the development of roofs of taller buildings will contribute to creating a distinctive skyline at this edge of the West End and entrance to the city. In light of this, the finishing and detailing of materials used must be attractive and visually interesting.

- (a) Tall and mid-rise buildings should have a distinctive roof treatment and large areas of flat roof should be avoided. Vents and mechanical equipment should be incorporated into an overall roof treatment that creates a strong image on the skyline.
- (b) The roofs of lower buildings should be designed and landscaped to be attractive seen from above. Mechanical rooms and elevator towers should be screened with materials and finishes compatible with those used on the facade and roof.

## 5.2 Entrances

Most West End buildings have clearly defined prominent entrances which animate the street and create identity.

- (a) Each individual building should have a distinctive entrance appropriate to the scale of building.
- (b) Each entrance should provide weather protection in a manner and scale appropriate to the buildings' overall scale.
- (c) Properties on the 1600 and 1900 blocks on the south side of Georgia Street should have their main pedestrian entrances on Alberni Street. If desired, towers may also have a pedestrian entrance from Georgia Street.
- (d) Development fronting Chilco Street should have its entrance on Chilco Street, if parking and access patterns make it possible.
- (e) Buildings and retail uses fronting Denman Street should have their entrances on Denman Street.

## 5.3 Balconies

- (a) Balconies should be a minimum of six feet deep to allow adequate usable space.
- (b) To create a cohesive image, balconies should be integrated with the building design and not “tacked on”.
- (c) Balconies may be enclosed for acoustic purposes subject to current City guidelines and policies on balcony enclosure and floor space additions.

## 5.4 Exterior Walls and Finishing

Finishes and colours of many types are found in the West End. However, in light of the prominence of this area the highest quality of finish must be used and colours, while not uniform, should avoid extremes of dark and white.

- (a) Finishing materials such as brick, stone and painted or tinted concrete are desirable. Stucco may be acceptable on low-rise buildings if well detailed. Unpainted, natural concrete should be avoided except perhaps as a base.
- (b) The use of an appropriate colour palette that avoids extremes is essential in this area.

Colours for larger surface areas of buildings should be in rich beiges, sands and buffs to present a warm yet bright image. Colours for building trim such as window frames and railing should fall within a more traditional or “Victorian” palette: deep, rich colour with a very high pigment content rather than bright or pastel colours.

## 5.5 Lights

The proper illumination of the landscaped areas of properties fronting Georgia Street is essential to providing a strong visual continuity for this major entrance to the city. It is important that this lighting be coordinated with both the pedestrian level and street lighting of the public domain. The opportunity also exists to co-ordinate this lighting with that of Stanley Park.

The other dimension in the area which needs to be accentuated is the night skyline.

In both cases, light “spill over” must be avoided.

- (a) Private development building, landscape and site lighting should be incandescent.
- (b) The unique roof treatments of tall towers should be illuminated with subtle flood lighting.

## **6. Open Space**

The single most significant element which will unify this area as both an extension of the West End and as a major entry experience to Vancouver is the treatment of the open space. In order to achieve both these goals — residential neighbourhood liveability and urban significance — a consistent theme and treatment must be developed unifying public, semi-private and private open space.

### **6.1 Public Open Space**

There are a number of public open spaces adjacent to the private sites in the area (Stanley Park and Devonian Harbour Park). There is also the future possibility of public mini-parks in the Chilco and/or Gilford Street ends. The resolution and design of these will take some time, however.

The existing public space — particularly Stanley Park — provides a source of architectural design details and landscape palette which can be adapted for use in the semi-private green courts and future mini-parks so that a thematic design continuity can be established for the whole area.

### **6.2 Semi-Private Space**

The semi-private “green courts” on Georgia Street and front yards on Alberni Street are traditionally a visual amenity for both residents and the general public, with soft landscaping and minimal paved area.

- (a) “Green Courts” on the 1600 to 1900 blocks should be clearly contained on three sides by buildings and be open and clearly visible from the fourth side facing Georgia Street.
- (b) Landscape plans for the “green courts” on the 1600 to 1900 blocks should be coordinated among the different projects in order to achieve a high degree of visual integration with public realm design for the overall area.
- (c) Any pools or playground areas should be located in an internal or screened location away from the street.
- (d) Architectural elements within the landscaped ground plane should be of a character similar to that found in Stanley Park (e.g. rough granite retaining walls, stone balustrades and, if possible, concrete lamp standards).

### **6.3 Private Open Space**

The provision of quality, usable private open space is key to maintaining liveability in a high-density setting such as the West End. It is usually provided by balconies and in some cases, patios. The opportunity exists in this area to provide more communal private space within ground level landscaped areas.

- (a) Private open spaces for residents should meet Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation standards and utilize features such as balconies, roof decks and terraces.
- (b) Private open spaces should be oriented to capture sunlight, take advantage of views and reduce noise impacts.
- (c) Where private open spaces face Georgia Street (e.g. patios within the green courts) special care must be taken with design and screening.

## **7. Landscaping**

### **7.1 Green Courts**

In order to create a unified ground plane, and to achieve a whole greater than the sum of the parts, common thematic elements must be defined in some detail for the green courts and other private open space facing Georgia Street.

- (a) Each block should install a similarly laid out series of planting beds, contained in low retaining walls. Retaining walls may vary in height but for most of their length should be low enough for a driver to clearly see the landscaping behind.
- (b) Adequate depth of soil should be provided above parking decks to allow planting good sized trees and shrubs.
- (c) Retaining walls should be faced in granite with a random rubble unpointed face, and an 8 inch minimum thick granite slab cap overhanging the wall face by at least 4 inches. Interruptions in the wall may occur for features, entries etc.
- (d) Planting beds in the courts should slope up from front to back to present the maximum area to the line of sight. Fronts should be planted in seasonal floral display beds (e.g. daffodils en masse as on the Causeway) or low or trailing blossoming plants. Rear of beds should have low flowering shrubs with interesting branching patterns (e.g. low dogwoods and magnolias as in the planters at the English Bay Bath House). Lush, larger landscaping such as rhododendrons and trees are appropriate further back in the green courts, to screen the low-rise development.
- (e) “Green courts” will vary from block to block, as functional and aesthetic requirements are met for specific conditions, but they should tend to be open at the front near the planters, and more lushly landscaped at the back, adjacent the buildings in the development

### **7.2 Georgia Streetscape**

A preliminary street landscape plan for Georgia Street was developed in 1986 and set out in the Georgia Street Second Century report. The recommendations regarding street tree planting and sidewalk paving contained there are appropriate to this area with some modifications necessitated by the Georgia Street “building line” and road widening.

- (a) A double row of “red sunset” red maples should be planted along the Georgia Street sidewalk at intervals of about 30 feet. There will be sufficient sidewalk space after road widening to allow both rows to be planted outside the new property line. However, it may be necessary for underground parking garage walls to indent to provide adequate space for the tree rootball.

- (b) Planting details and tree grates should be as described in Georgia Street Second Century with modification as required for specific circumstances.
- (c) Sidewalk paving should be as described in Georgia Street Second Century.
- (d) Pedestrian level street lighting and other street furnishings are still to be determined. City staff should be consulted.

Figure 4. Sidewalk and Green Court Section

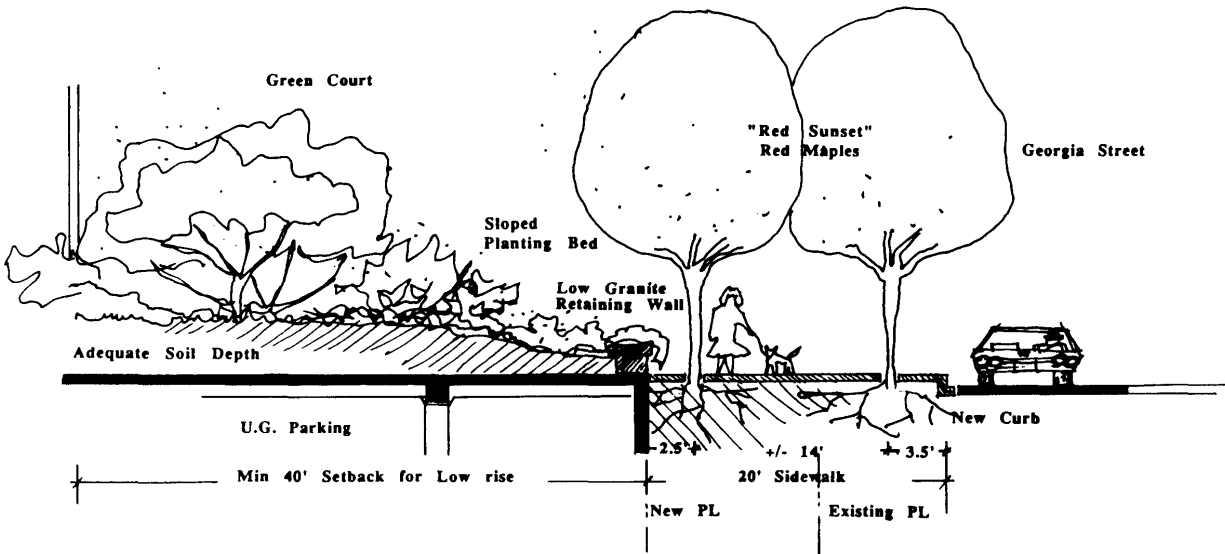
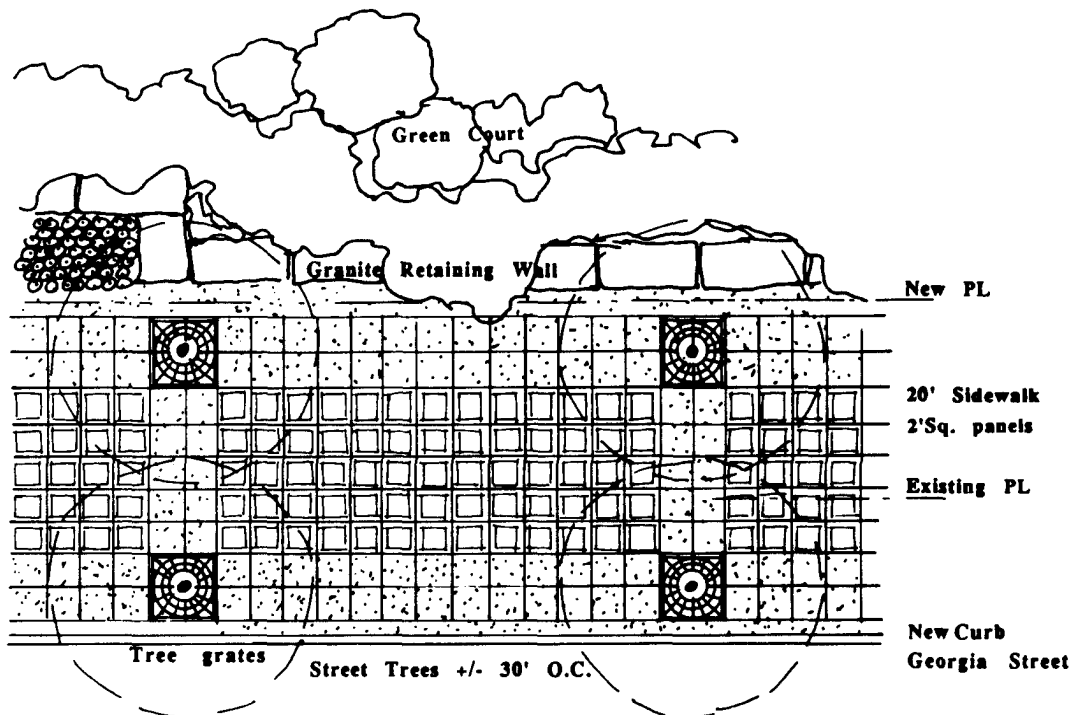


Figure 5. Sidewalk and Green Court Plan



### **7.3 Alberni Street Front Yards and Streetscape**

New development can contribute to creation of a typical West End residential street character on Alberni Street. Typically, buildings will be set back 12 feet to create a landscaped “front yard”, and all buildings will have their front doors on this side of the “double block”.

- (a) Generally, the Alberni Street setbacks must give the feeling of typical West End residential front yards. This may be modified where commercial uses are located on Alberni Street.
- (b) “Front” yards for mid-rise and high-rise towers are for visually-oriented planting not active use. As such, fences are not appropriate, although low retaining walls and foundation plantings are acceptable.
- (c) Fences may be permitted for low-rise buildings to fence in ground level residents' gardens or patios. However they must be designed and detailed to be compatible with the building. Low retaining walls, patios, decks and planters may also be permitted in the front yards of low-rise buildings. However, care must be taken to ensure that the overall appearance from the street is not dominated by walls and private space, but rather than the West End “front yard” character prevails.
- (d) The design of the Alberni Street streetscape should reflect that of the existing special routes and mini-parks west of Denman Street with concrete unit paver sidewalks and grass boulevards planted with a single row of street trees.

## **Appendix**

### **Submission Requirements**

Applicants should refer to the information required for significant development permit applications contained in the checklist in Brochure #3: How To...Development Permits for Major Applications.