

Guidelines

Solar Access Guidelines for the Downtown Peninsula

Approved by Council September 17, 2025



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The City of Vancouver acknowledges that it is situated on the unceded traditional territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam Indian Band), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish Nation), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh Nation).

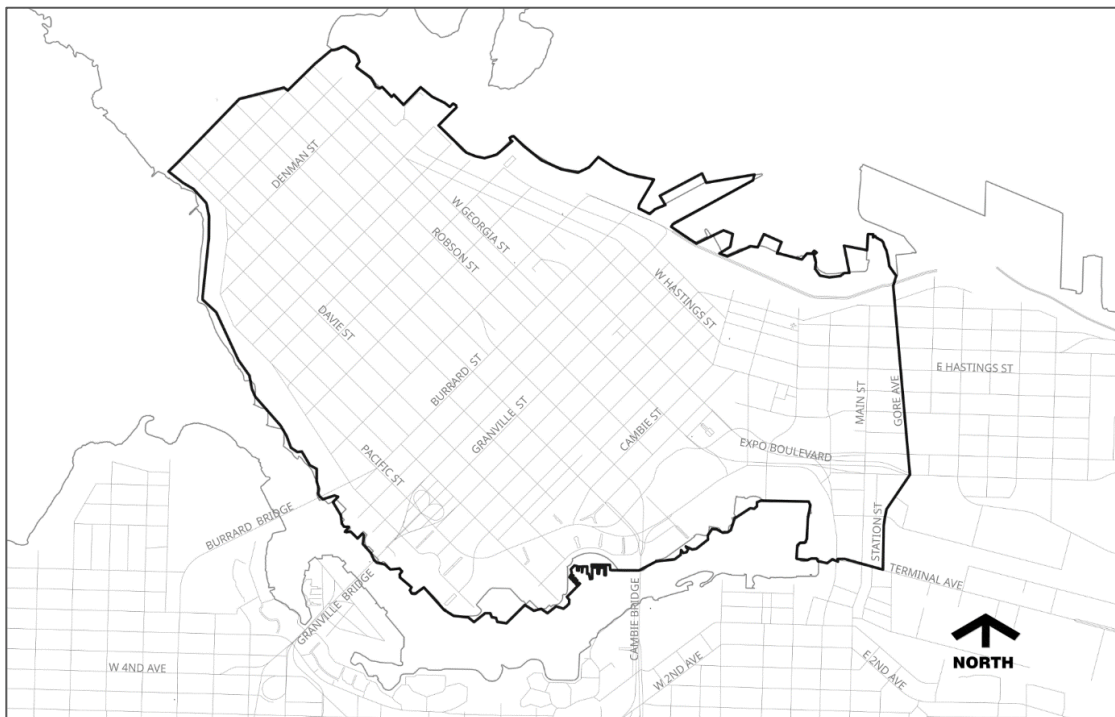
1 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Vancouver's northern temperate oceanic climate brings long periods of overcast skies in fall, winter and spring, contrasted with clear, dry summers. In this setting, solar access is a valuable urban asset that supports active public life, extends the patio and park season, promotes physical and mental well-being and improves conditions in outdoor spaces by supporting vegetation and reducing standing water on fields and playgrounds.

Sunlit parks, plazas, and commercial streets are consistently more used—especially during shoulder seasons—making strategic access to sunlight essential to a liveable, resilient city. However, managing solar access requires a balanced approach. While public spaces see peak use between 9 am and 6 pm, the City assesses shadow impacts between 10 am and 4 pm PDT to reasonably protect sunlight during key hours without overly limiting development.

In the Downtown Peninsula (Map 1), where the street grid is rotated off axis and urban intensity is higher than other areas of the city, a flexible, context-sensitive approach is used to balance sunlight access with housing, economic and design priorities.

Map 1: Vancouver Downtown Peninsula



2 APPLICATION AND INTENT

These guidelines apply to the review of development proposals within the Downtown Peninsula (Map 1) that may create additional shadowing of applicable protected public outdoor spaces. They apply at both the enquiry and application stages and are to be read in conjunction with all relevant City policies, regulations, and design guidelines for rezoning and conditional development permit applications.

The purpose of these guidelines is to establish a consistent framework for managing solar access in the Downtown Peninsula, providing clarity for developers, City staff, and the public in the assessment of proposals. Unlike regulations, which are generally applied without discretion, guidelines articulate intent while allowing for flexibility in application. The overall intent of these guidelines is to balance new development with the protection of solar access, ensuring that downtown's public open spaces remain appropriately bright, welcoming, and supportive of healthy urban vegetation, while maintaining the area's role as the region's economic hub.

Applicable public open spaces are classified into categories, each with a corresponding approach to managing solar access. Table 1 lists the protected public open spaces and their categories. Separate solar access guidelines apply to the areas of Davie Village and Robson Village as shown in Map 2 and Map 3.

3 GUIDELINES

3.1 Community Parks, Neighbourhood Parks, Local Parks and School Sites

- 3.1.1 Proposed development should not cast new shadows within the property lines of existing or planned Community Parks, Neighbourhood Parks, Local Parks and school sites as identified in Table 1 on the fall equinox (September 22) from 10 am to 4 pm PDT.
- 3.1.2 Council, the Development Permit Board, or the Director of Planning may consider exceptions to 3.1.1 on a site-by-site basis subject to the following:
 - (a) The proposed development contributes a substantive public benefit (e.g., social housing, below-market rental housing, public childcare facility, heritage conservation, etc.) or advances a major city-building priority as identified by City policies applicable to developments in the downtown peninsula;
 - (b) The applicant submits a shadow rationale statement outlining the proposed response to 3.1.2 (a) and summarizing the impact of strict compliance with 3.1.1 to project viability;
 - (c) The applicant submits a Detailed Fall Equinox Shadow Study, as outlined in Section 5.2.
- 3.1.3 In evaluating the supportability of exceptions per 3.1.2, staff will consider the following:
 - (a) The quality and function of the impacted public outdoor spaces at key times of the day and year, including limiting impacts to vulnerable populations;
 - (b) The characteristics and duration of the shadow resulting from the proposed development;
 - (c) The unique constraints of the development parcel, including topography and site configuration;
 - (d) The measures explored by the applicant to minimize the resulting shadow impacts;

- (e) In the case of rezonings, the form of development expectations of base zoning on the proposed development parcel.

3.1.4 As needed, additional shadow studies at other dates or time ranges may be required.

3.2 West End Miniparks and Urban Plazas

3.2.1 Proposed development should proactively explore strategies to minimize new shadow impacts on adjacent West End Miniparks and Urban Plazas as identified in Table 1 on the fall equinox (September 22) from 10 am to 4 pm PDT where possible.

Table 1: Public Park, School Site or Plaza Classification

Public Park, School Site or Plaza	Classification	Notes
300 Helmcken Plaza	Urban Plaza	
Alexandra Park	Local	
Andy Livingstone Park	Community	
Art Phillips Park	Urban Plaza	
Barclay Heritage Square	Neighbourhood	
Bill Curtis Square (Yaletown Station Plaza)	Urban Plaza	
Blood Alley Square	Urban Plaza	
Broughton St. at Nelson St. Minipark	West End Minipark	
Bute St. at Haro St. Minipark	West End Minipark	
Bute-Robson Plaza	Urban Plaza	
Cardero Park	Local	
Cardero St. at Burnaby St. Minipark	West End Minipark	
Cardero St. at Comox St. Minipark	West End Minipark	
Cathedral Square	Urban Plaza	
Chilco St. at Comox St. Minipark	West End Minipark	
Chinatown Memorial Square	Urban Plaza	

Public Park, School Site or Plaza	Classification	Notes
Coal Harbour Park	Neighbourhood	
Coopers' Park	Community	
CRAB Park at Portside	Community	
Creekside Park	Neighbourhood	
David Lam Park	Community	
Devonian Harbour Park	Neighbourhood	
Dilawri Square North	Urban Plaza	
Dilawri Square South	Urban Plaza	Refer to Section 4.2
Downtown Skateboard Plaza	Urban Plaza	
Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Gardens and Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Park	Local	Refer to Section 4.1
Elsie Roy Elementary	School Site	
Emery Barnes Park	Neighbourhood	
English Bay Beach Park	Community	
George Wainborn Park	Neighbourhood	
Gilford St. at Haro St. Minipark	West End Minipark	
Harbour Green Park	Community	
Helmcken Park	Urban Plaza	
Jack Poole Plaza	Urban Plaza	Refer to Section 4.2
Jervis St. at Burnaby St. Minipark	West End Minipark	
Jervis St. Park Site at Pacific St.	Local	
Jim Deva Plaza	Urban Plaza	
King George Secondary	School Site	

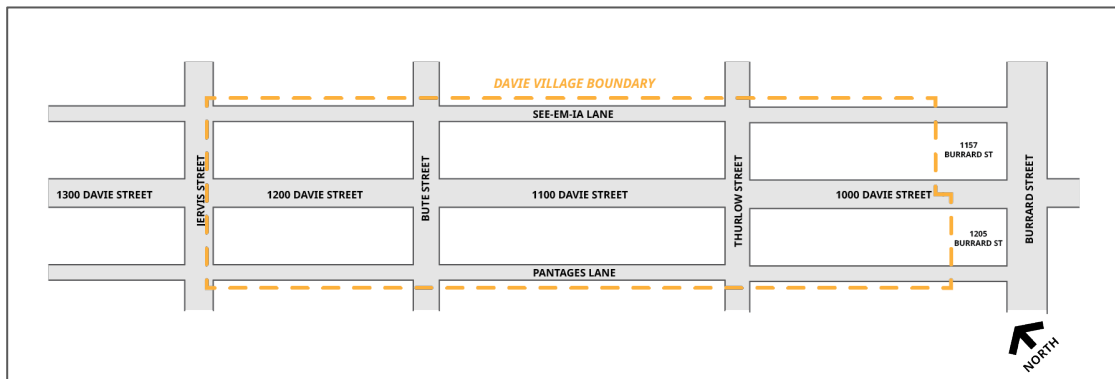
Public Park, School Site or Plaza	Classification	Notes
Lord Roberts Annex	School Site	
Lord Roberts Elementary	School Site	
Lot 19 (Hornby St. at Hastings St. Plaza)	Urban Plaza	
Marina Square	Neighbourhood	
May & Lorne Brown Park	Local	
Morton Park	Local	
Nelson Park	Community	
Nicola St. at Pendrell St. Minipark	West End Minipark	
Pioneer Place (Pigeon Park)	Urban Plaza	
Portal Park	Urban Plaza	
Robson Square	Urban Plaza	Refer to Section 4.2
Roundhouse Turntable Park	Neighbourhood	
Sunset Beach Park	Community	
šxw'łənəq Xwtl'e7énk	Urban Plaza	Formerly Vancouver Art Gallery North Plaza
šxw'łəxən Xwtl'a7shn	Urban Plaza	Formerly Queen Elizabeth Theatre Plaza
sθəqəlxenəm ts'exwts'áxwi7 (Rainbow Park)	Neighbourhood	
Thornton Park	Neighbourhood	
Victory Square	Urban Plaza	Refer to Section 4.3
Wendy Poole Park	Local	
Yaletown Park	Urban Plaza	

3.3 Davie Village and Robson Village

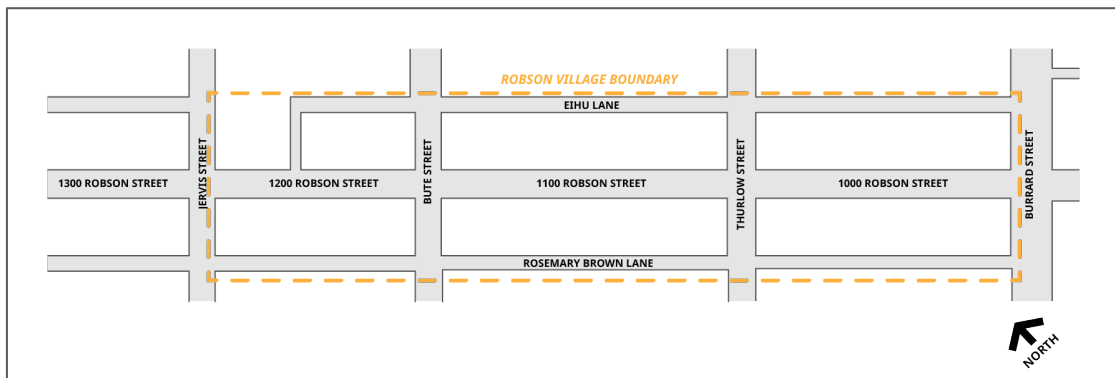
3.3.1 Proposed development should not introduce new shadowing of the north sidewalk, measured from the curb to property line, of the Davie Village (Map 2) and Robson Village (Map 3) on the fall equinox, at the following times:

- (a) Davie Village: from 10 am to 4 pm PDT
- (b) Robson Village: from 10 am to 3 pm PDT

Map 2: Davie Village



Map 3: Robson Village



3.3.2 Council, the Development Permit Board, or the Director of Planning may consider exceptions to 3.3.1 on a site-by-site basis subject to the following:

- (a) The proposed development contributes a substantive public benefit (e.g., social housing, below-market rental housing, public childcare facility, heritage conservation, etc.) or advances a major city-building priority as identified by City policies applicable to developments in the downtown peninsula;
- (b) The applicant submits a shadow rationale statement outlining the proposed response to 3.3.2 (a) and summarizing the impact of strict compliance with 3.3.1 to project viability;

- (c) The applicant submits a Detailed Fall Equinox Shadow Study for the affected block(s), as outlined in Section 5.2.

3.3.3 In evaluating the supportability of exceptions per 3.3.2, staff will consider the following:

- (a) The quality and function of the impacted public outdoor spaces at key times of the day and year, including limiting impacts to vulnerable populations;
- (b) The characteristics and duration of the shadow resulting from the proposed development;
- (c) The unique constraints of the development parcel, including topography and site configuration;
- (d) The measures explored by the applicant to minimize the resulting shadow impacts;
- (e) In the case of rezonings, the form of development expectations of base zoning on the proposed development parcel.

3.3.4 As needed, additional shadow studies at other dates or time ranges may be required.

4 SPECIAL CASES

4.1 Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Gardens and Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Park

4.1.1 Despite the guidelines for Community Parks, Neighbourhood Parks, Local Parks and school sites outlined in Section 3.1, developments should not create new shadows on Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Gardens and Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Park at any time between 10 am and 4 pm PDT on the fall equinox (September 22).

4.2 Dilawri Square South, Jack Poole Plaza, and Robson Square

4.2.1 Despite the guidelines for West End Miniparks and Urban Plazas outlined in Section 3.2, applicants proposing developments which may result in new shadowing of Dilawri Square South, Jack Poole Plaza, or Robson Square should consult the guidelines for Community Parks, Neighbourhood Parks, Local Parks and school sites outlined in Section 3.1.

4.3 Victory Square

4.3.1 In addition to the guidelines for Local Parks, Community Parks, Neighbourhood Parks and school sites outlined in Section 3.1, developments should not shadow the Victory Square Cenotaph circle between 10 am and 12 pm PST on Remembrance Day (November 11).

4.3.2 Exceptions to 4.5.1 may be considered subject to comprehensive public and key stakeholder engagement.

5 SHADOW STUDIES

Models used to demonstrate compliance with these guidelines should be accurately geolocated, set to Pacific Daylight Time (PDT, UTC -7) unless otherwise specified and include the complete built and approved urban context, including topography. Where applicable, known proposed developments should also be incorporated to reflect anticipated future conditions. New shadows generated by a proposed development should be visually delineated from existing shadows.

For the purposes of solar access studies, shadows cast by trees, public shade structures and small park outbuildings are not considered part of the existing shadow baseline.

5.1 Basic Fall Equinox Shadow Study

- 5.1.1 All applicants in the Downtown Peninsula should submit a Basic Fall Equinox Shadow Access Study visually demonstrating the new shadowing generated by the proposed development at two-hour intervals between 10 am and 4 pm PDT on the fall equinox (September 22).

5.2 Detailed Fall Equinox Shadow Study

- 5.2.1 Applicants qualifying for a relaxation to the baseline guidelines outlined in 3.1.1 and 3.3.1 should submit a Detailed Fall Equinox Shadow Study, covering the period from 10 am to 4 pm PDT, at 15-minute intervals, on the fall equinox (September 22), including the following:
- (a) Diagrams visually demonstrating the existing and proposed additional shadowing of the applicable public space(s) at each interval;
 - (b) Area take-offs, in square meters, of the existing, proposed additional, and cumulative total shadowing of the applicable public space(s) or affected village block(s) at each interval; and
 - (c) Separate calculations, in percentages, of the existing, proposed additional, and cumulative total shadow coverage of the applicable public space(s), using the following formula:

$$\text{Shadow Coverage (\%)} = \frac{\text{Total shadow area from all 15-min intervals (sq. m)}}{\text{Area of applicable public open space (sq. m) x 25}}$$

Where:

- **Total shadow area from all 15-min intervals** = the combined area (sq. m) of existing, proposed additional, or cumulative total shadow measured at each interval between 10 am and 4 pm.
- **25** = the number of 15-minute intervals in that time period.

6 GENERAL EXEMPTIONS

6.1 Low-rise Buildings ($\leq$ Four Storeys)

- 6.1.1 Buildings up to four storeys in height may be exempted from these guidelines where reasonable efforts are made to minimize shadow impacts.