

ARCHITECTURAL & DESIGN GUIDELINES **UNION PLAZA** CITY OF EL PASO | 2023



ARCHITECTURAL & DESIGN GUIDELINES **UNION PLAZA**

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT DEPARTMENT - CITY DESIGN LAB

PLANNING AND INSPECTIONS DEPARTMENT

CITY OF EL PASO, TEXAS | 2023

MISSION

Deliver exceptional service to support a high quality of life and place for our community.

VISION

Develop a vibrant regional economy, safe and beautiful neighborhoods and exceptional recreational, cultural and educational opportunities powered by a high performing government.

VALUES

Integrity
Respect,
Excellence,
Accountability,
People

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CITY OF EL PASO

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INTRODUCTION TO THE GUIDELINES

ABOUT THE DESIGN GUIDELINES

Design guidelines are used in communities all over the United States. They are a helpful reference, and after the City Council adopts design guidelines, they also become requirements that must be followed. The design guidelines aim to improve the quality, development compatibility, and design permanence found in the Union Plaza District.

Union Plaza District strives to build upon its image as the most vibrant, walkable, mixed-use urban district in downtown El Paso. This document promotes enriching development by assuring it aspires to a greater architectural and urban design standard.

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DESIGN INTENT SUMMARY



PURPOSE

These guidelines' primary purpose is to preserve Union Plaza District's general character. This document lists recommendations for site development, building form, and architectural character to ensure that new development contributes to our Downtown urban design goals and is compatible with the character of the existing Union Plaza District. Today, urban planning principles are guiding the City of El Paso to create new policies and regulations that will help restore a strong sense of place to our neighborhoods, commercial districts, and major transportation corridors.



VISION

To provide convenient guidance, promote long-term preservation of property values through livability, and maintain the historic character of the Union Plaza District. These guidelines shall apply to all buildings within the boundaries of the Union Plaza District.

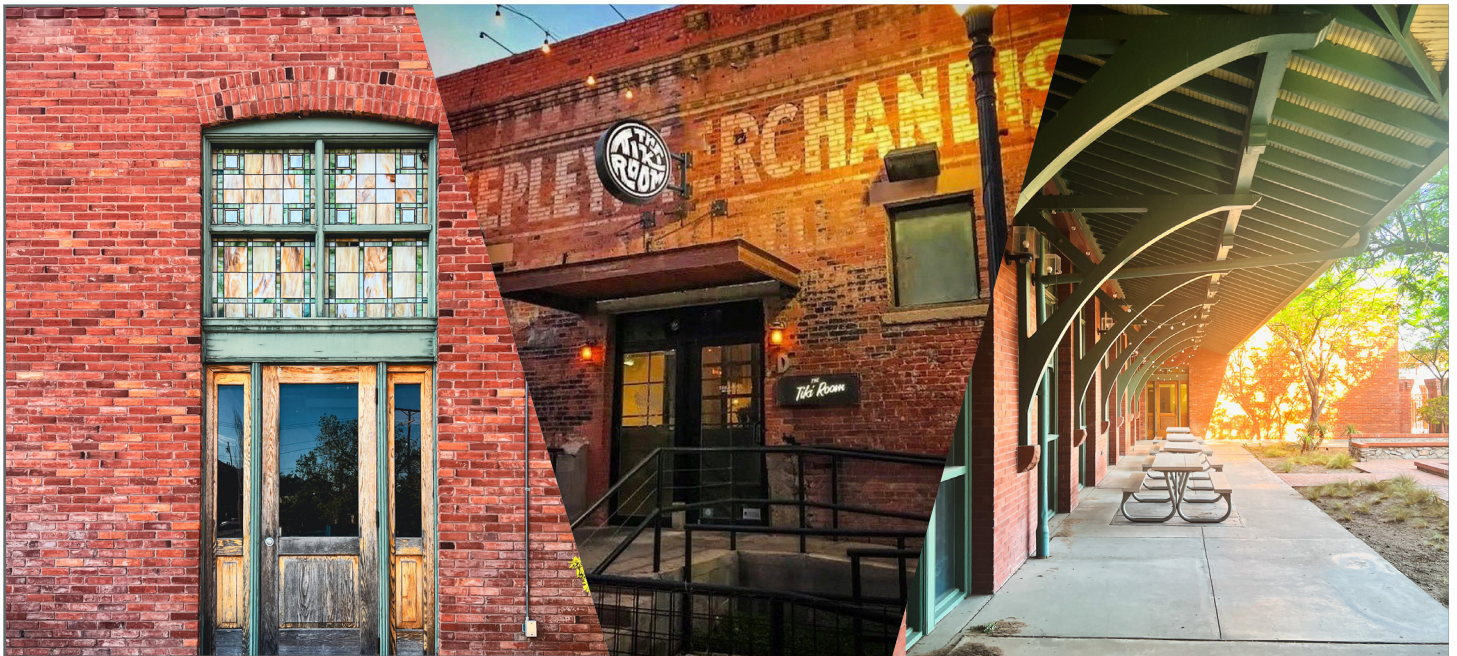
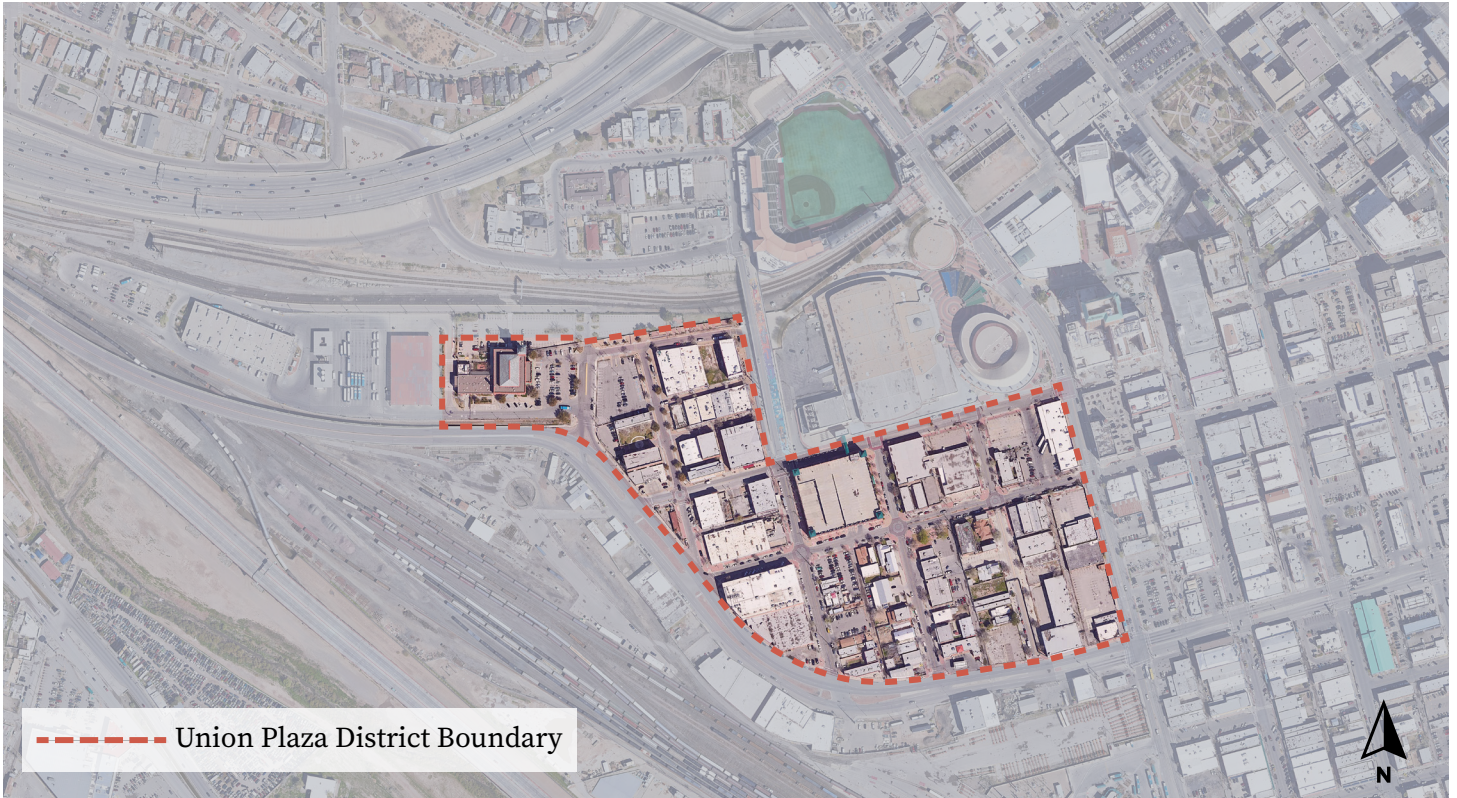


OBJECTIVES

To provide convenient guidance, promote long-term preservation of property values through livability, and maintain the historic character of the Union Plaza District. These guidelines shall apply to all buildings within the boundaries of the Union Plaza District.

- Promote a pedestrian-oriented urban form.
- Maximize connectivity, infrastructure, and equity.
- Create dense development by supporting existing and new opportunities.
- Encourage adaptive reuse and support preservation.
- Strengthen our local economy.
- Enhance local identity and sense of place through place-making.

Union Plaza District Boundary



HISTORY

This part of downtown was developed, for the most part, after the completion of the Union Depot, a Daniel Burnham building from 1906, and thus, the surviving buildings reflect the character of that time. The surviving buildings of this era in this district are of masonry load-bearing construction with simple two-part commercial façades or warehouses. There are also two-story tenements and single-family houses from this period, reflecting masonry, adobe, and stone construction. The use of building materials achieved diverse expression in design. Brick comes in numerous colors and textures and is the predominant material. Cut stone was used for lintels, arches, and copings. Cast iron can still be seen in columns and beams. Successful redevelopment has been achieved through the adaptive reuse of existing buildings into mixed-use residential, commercial, and entertainment uses, successfully retaining the district's character.

Buildings constructed along San Francisco Street and San Antonio Street between 1900 and 1920 emphasize unity, order, and balance. The importance given to these qualities reflects two allied concerns. First is the premise that tradition provides the basis for sound design principles. Second is the belief that these principles apply not just to individual buildings but also to groups of buildings as a whole. Based on this premise, commercial buildings should contribute to a coherent urban landscape. While each façade may possess its own identity, and some should stand out as landmarks, most examples should be restrained and relatively unobtrusive. For the sake of design unity and identification, all future renovation and new infill construction shall use the Union Depot, a local and national landmark, as a reference for these guidelines.

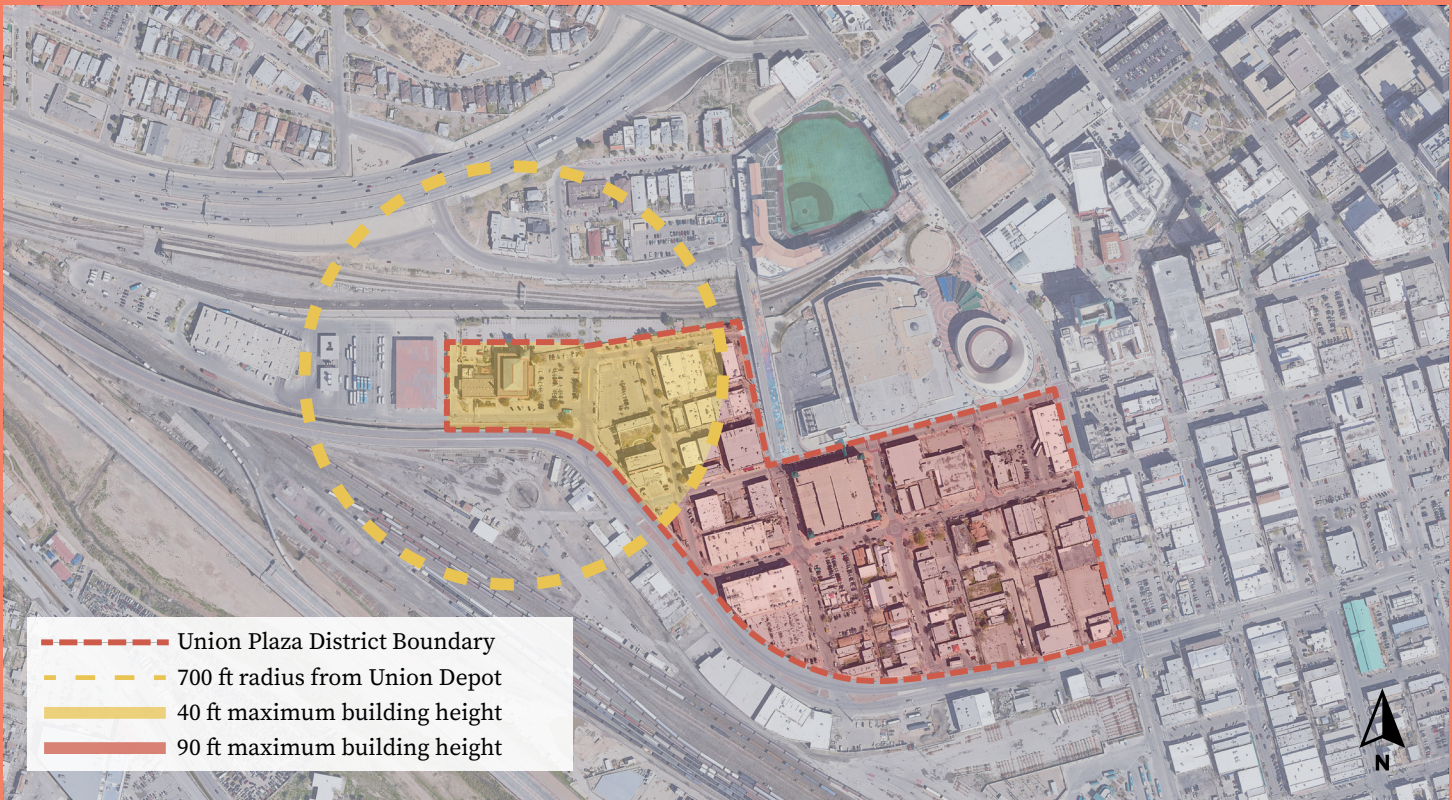


SITE DEVELOPMENT

HEIGHT

In the Union Plaza District, height limits of buildings or structures within a seven hundred (700) foot radius of any part of the façade of the Union Depot shall not exceed forty (40) feet as specified in [Section 20.10.360B](#). Please refer to the exhibit below.

Height limits of buildings or structures outside the seven hundred (700) foot radius will follow those height limitations as specified in [Title 20 Appendix B - Table of Density and Dimensional Standards](#) in the Zoning Code not to exceed ninety (90) feet.



SITE DEVELOPMENT

DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS

In the case of new construction of a mixed-use project, residential uses shall not occupy the ground floor. If the conditions below are met OR unless granted exemption through administrative review of a Detailed Site Development Plan:

- Not allowed when adjacent to a sidewalk.
- Allowed when a ground entrance is provided behind a commercial use, i.e., through a courtyard.

Where alleys are present, vehicular shall be prohibited from the front yard. Buildings shall be oriented to the street or the principal pedestrian entrance. For purposes of this requirement, “oriented” shall mean the building side(s) with the building’s main entrance. To activate the space for pedestrians, blank wall facades shall include any building face without an entrance or transparent windows. Refer to section “[Building Details](#)”.

Lot widths are to follow the initial/original subdivision lots of the area.

Due to the nature of existing development in the Union Plaza District, front, sides, or rear yards are zero-lot line.



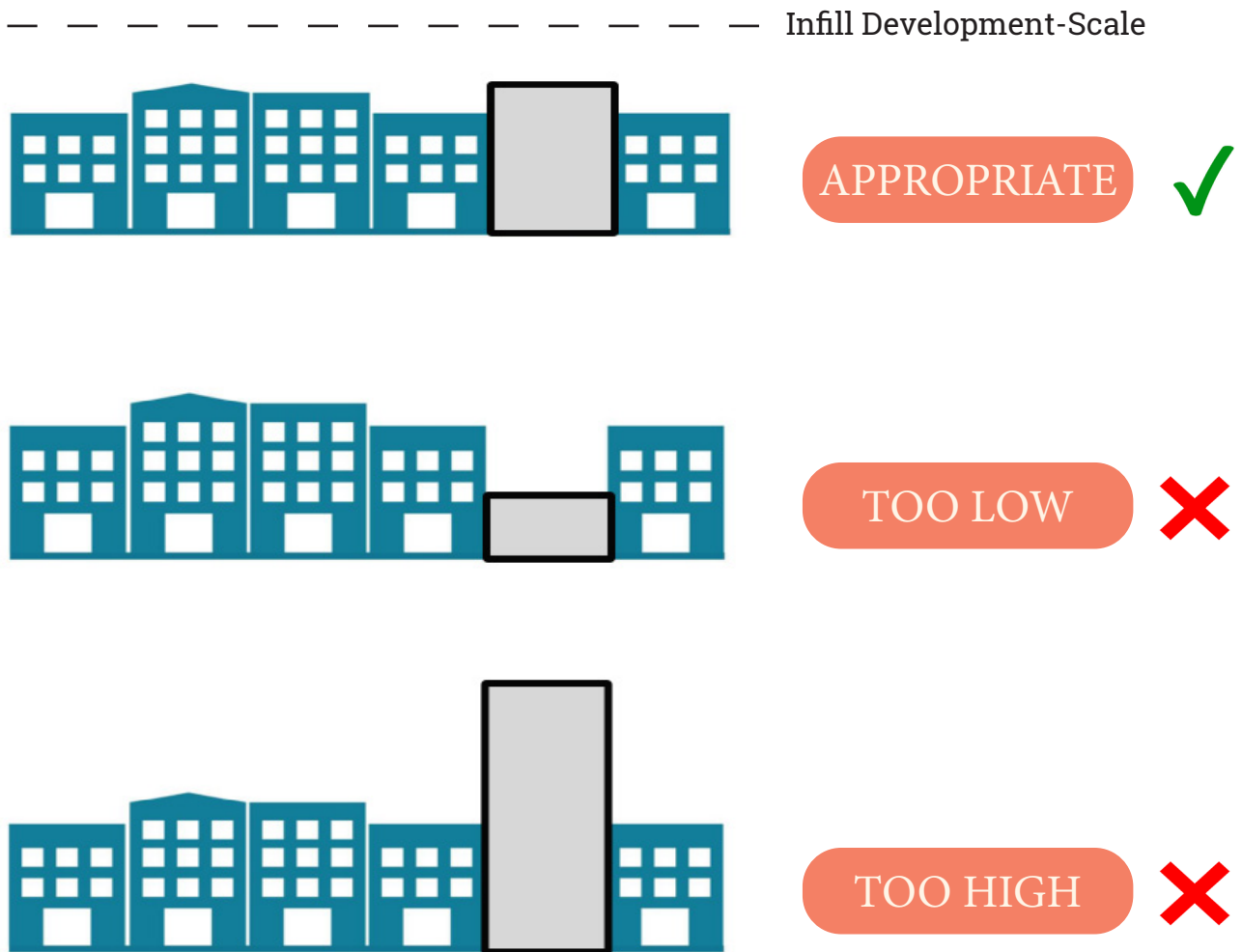
SITE DEVELOPMENT

PATTERN & RYTHM

The repetition of walls, windows, and doors in the façade of the building establishes a pattern sensed by a person observing a building. Architectural elements such as covered entrances, display windows, landscaping projections, and roof lines contribute to the pattern and rhythm of any urban environment.

New construction and additions should maintain and reinforce the existing pattern and contribute contextually through proportional height and massing. For larger buildings, this can be achieved by the articulating elevations and façades.

Refer to section “[Building Details](#)”.



SITE DETAILS

SIDEWALK AND PEDESTRIAN CROSSINGS

For projects within the public right-of-way, designers should strive to incorporate the following design elements.

- Sidewalks and pedestrian crossings should be enhanced by the use of color patterns.
- Enhancements can be accomplished by using pavers, tiles, impressing patterns on concrete, or other techniques.
- Material in crosswalks should be smooth to allow easy walking and access. Heavy textures and materials should be utilized at the border to separate the crosswalk from the roadway.

Sidewalks and pedestrian crossings must align with the adopted [El Paso Complete Streets Policy 2022](#).



SITE DETAILS

LIGHTING

Lighting provides safety and visibility. It provides safe movement of vehicular and pedestrian traffic, security and crime prevention, and accentuates important landmarks.

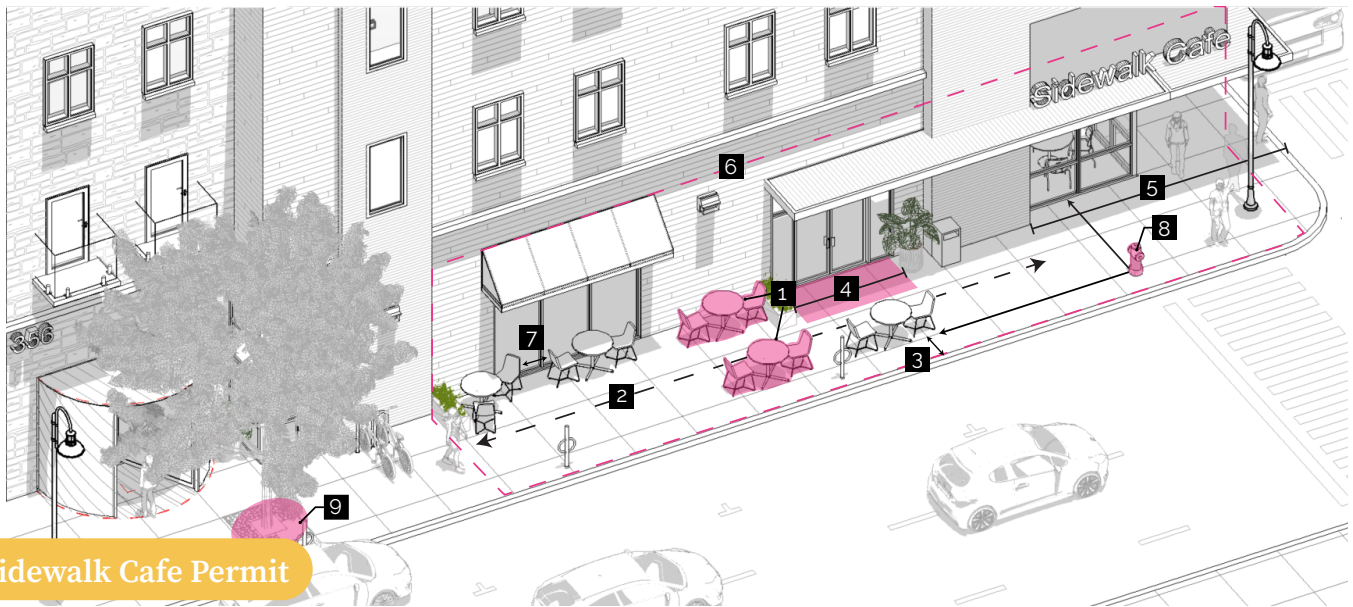
Period light fixtures should be installed on all sidewalks, alleys, open spaces and building facades with the owner's permission, and security lighting in alleys and parking lots. Scone lighting is permitted. Neon lighting and fiber optics may be used on building fronts as logos, accents, and signs inside window displays or to highlight architectural features.



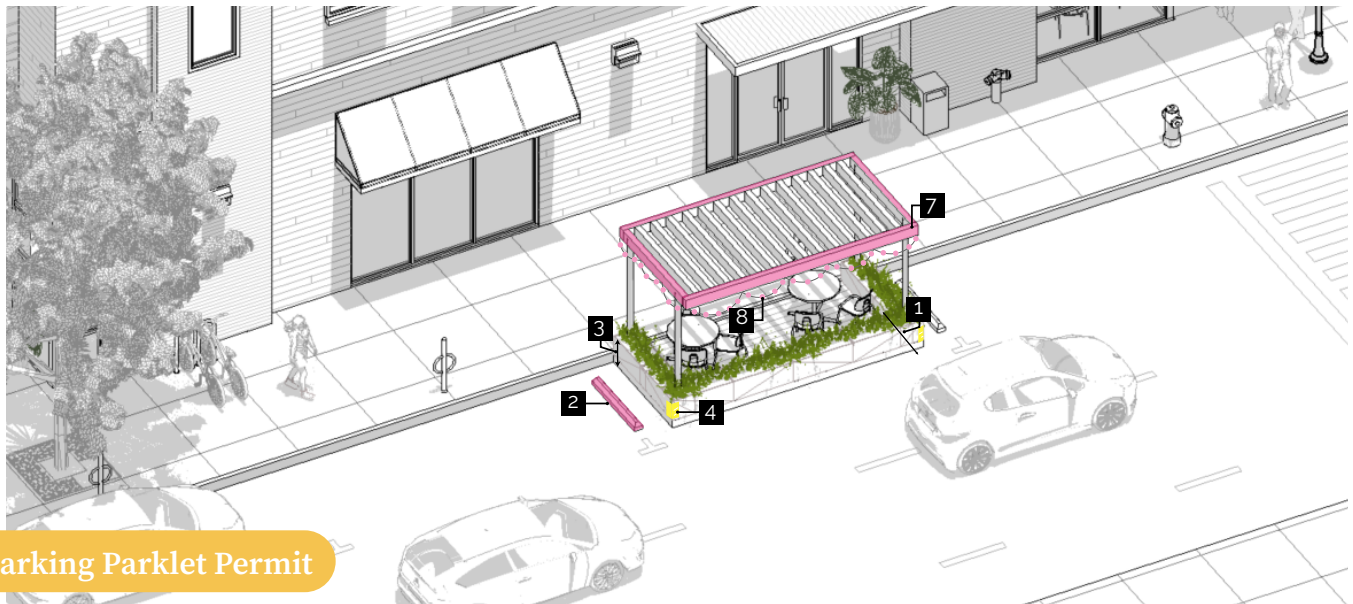
SITE DETAILS

OUTDOOR CAFES

Outdoor cafes shall follow regulations in title 15 and 20 and the [Right-of-Way Cafe Program 2023](#). The dimensional standards of an outdoor cafe shall align with the Right-of-Way Cafe program. Landscape for outdoor cafes in the right-of-way should follow the [Downtown Street Tree Master Plan 2023](#).



Sidewalk Cafe Permit



Parking Parklet Permit

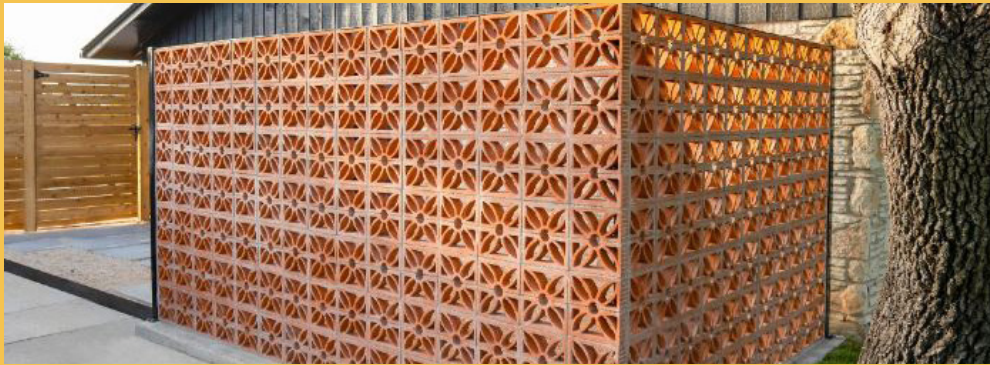
*Image source [Right-of-Way Cafe Program 2023](#)

SITE DETAILS

FENCING AND WALLS

Brick, masonry (not to include cinderblock), decorative breeze blocks, and wrought iron materials are acceptable for fencing. **Chain link fencing is incompatible** with the Union Plaza District and is not permitted in the district. Loading docks and trash receptacles shall be screened. Iron bollards with the chains are acceptable as fencing for parking lots. In permissible uses, removal of surface lots as a permitted use or limited to locations such as behind buildings.

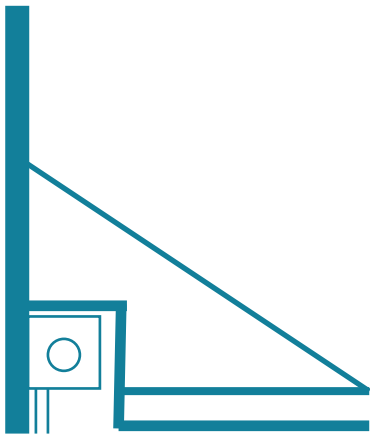
Specific design and locations regulations for fences and screening walls shall follow the requirements in [Sections 21.50.070\(F\)\(5\)](#) of the El Paso City Code.



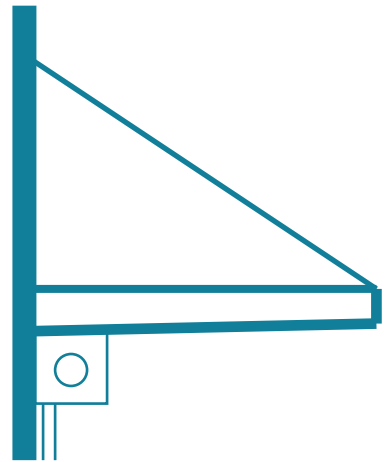
SITE DETAILS

SECURITY

Metal security grills are permitted. Security grills, other than electronic security devices, are limited to roll-up screen/doors/grills and shall be incorporated and concealed by a storefront awning or otherwise integrated into the design of the building facades. Devices housing mechanisms must not be visible. The curtain itself shall be of an open mesh design. Solid curtains are prohibited.



APPROPRIATE ✓



NOT APPROPRIATE ✗

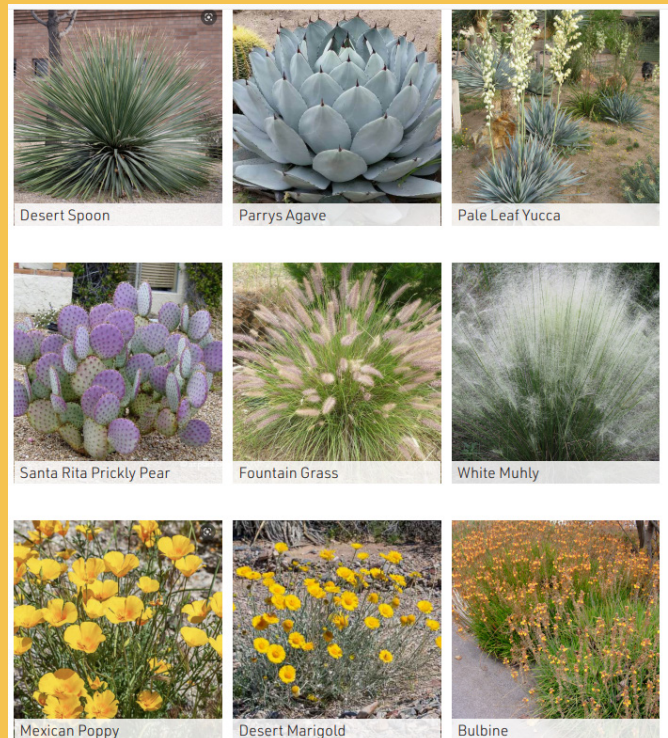
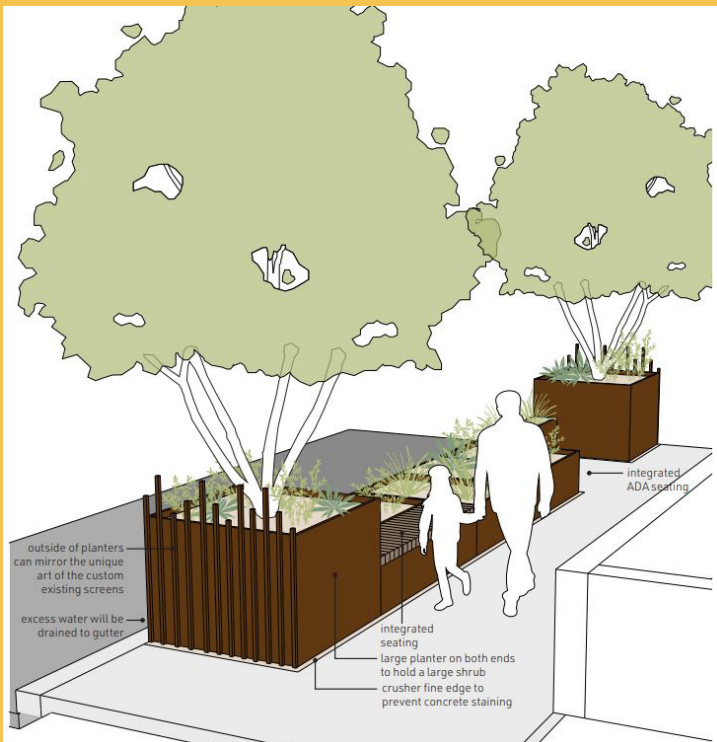


SITE DETAILS

LANDSCAPING

The regulations of **Chapter 18.46** of the El Paso City Code (Landscape Ordinance) are exempt in the district. However, landscaping should utilize drought tolerant plants and shrubs in the **approved list by the City Arborist** that effectively shade buildings and right-of-ways. Union Plaza shall also follow the standards set in the **Downtown Street Tree Master Plan 2023**. Given the lack of building setbacks and sidewalk widths, creative use of window boxes and planters should be encouraged. Planters should provide an internal irrigation system to promote the long term life of the landscaping. Functional considerations such as solar radiation, water demands, plant selection and maintenance requirements should be given careful attention . Aesthetic principles to be considered are unity, balance , and scale. Both aesthetic and functional principles should be analyzed completely when designing a landscape plan for any redevelopment or new construction project.

Following the Union Plaza requirements will be eligible for landscape reduction.



*Image source **Downtown Street Master Plan 2023**

BUILDING DETAILS

EXTERIOR FINISHES

The following are material recommendations and guidelines for articulating the facades and elevations of new construction or additions permissible in the Union Plaza District.

- Existing masonry and mortar should be retained if possible. The original color and texture of masonry should be retained wherever possible.
- Original architectural detailing should be maintained as much as possible.
- Colors used for finish should blend with surrounding buildings/materials. Bright colors should be used only as accent colors.

MATERIAL UTILIZATION GUIDELINES

For commercial and residential construction, applicant may chose one from the following options:

- A.** Two to four material category combination in hierarchy:
- Primary material: no more than 70% of the surface area of the building envelope
 - Secondary material: no more than 40% of the surface area of the building envelope
 - Tertiary material: no more than 25% of the surface area of the building envelope
 - Accent material: limited to trim and details

OR

- B.** Material category combination in varying horizontal projections, or relief:
- Minimum two material category selections
 - Material selections may NOT abut one another in a flush or continuous plane
 - Minimum material projection from main façade plane to be 4 in.

OR

- C.** A combination of options A and B to be reviewed administratively for approval
- Proposed material subdivision as additions to the materials categories may be Considered

MATERIAL CATEGORY LIST

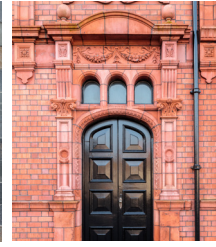
Masonry



Brick



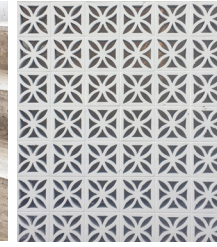
Stone cladding



Terra cotta

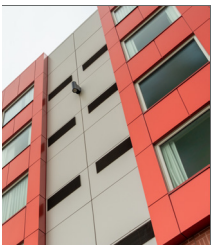


Natural stone

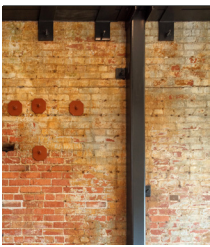


Breeze blocks

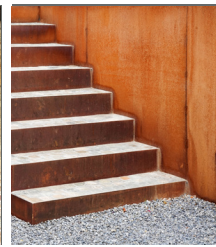
Metals



MCM - metal composite materials



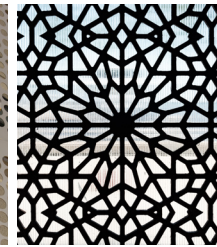
Structural metal framing/steel framing



Weathering steel (Corten)



Perforated/expanded metals



Metal fabrications



Decorative metals



Prefabricated metal finishes

Concrete



Cast in place concrete



Architectural concrete



Stamped concrete/Concrete finish



Polished/colored concrete



Pre-cast concrete panels



Tilt-up concrete

Wood and composites



Heavy timber construction



Wood siding



Exposed glulam construction



Laminated veneer lumber



Cast polymer fabrications

Finishes



Tiling (ceramic, glass, porcelain, mosaic, etc)



Terrazzo



Plastering



Stucco

*Glazing is not included as a material, as **all** buildings are expected to include some form of glazing.

BUILDING DETAILS

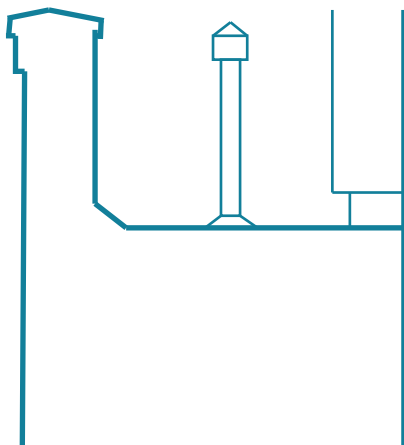
ROOFS

Any roof structure included as part of new construction must be compatible in the flat roof, built-up asphalt design and style of other buildings and with the Union Depot, or complimentary/ contributing to the character. Factory colored metal roofing is considered acceptable within the Union Plaza Project Area.

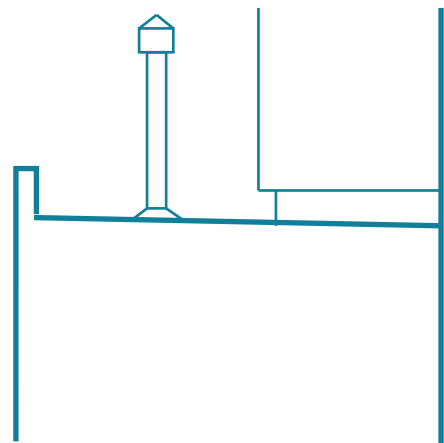
CHIMNEYS AND VENTS

The existing structures in Union Plaza do not have large, conspicuous, smokestacks, chimneys or roof-mounted vents. Unless these are required for normal operation of a facility by the building or safety codes, they are not recommended as part of a new building design.

Reasonable attempts should be made to conceal unsightly vents with materials or in the placement of such vent. Flat roofs shall be enclosed by parapets a minimum of forty-two (42) inches high, or as required to conceal mechanical equipment. (See [section 21.50.140](#))



APPROPRIATE ✓



NOT APPROPRIATE ✗

*Hide vents and mechanical equipment behind parapets

BUILDING DETAILS

WINDOWS AND DOORS

- Only non-reflective glazing that is clear, lightly tinted, or smoked is permitted.
- Original windows and door should be preserved and maintained provided that they are in good condition. Replacement windows and doors must either match the same size and style of the original or complement the existing aesthetic.
- Architectural detail such as arches, lintels and transoms (even if they are not operable) should be preserved as part of the building elements when possible.
- Awnings, extended roof eaves, and deep-set windows are alternative ways to shade windows without the use of reflective surfaces.
- Shaded entryways and patios to preclude cooled air loss are recommended.
- Doorways are an important feature of any building and should either reflect the architecture of the area or present a prominent entrance that contributes to the aesthetic of the building.



BUILDING DETAILS

DOWNSPOUTS

- Anodized aluminum and copper downspouts are acceptable.
- All roof runoff must drain through downspout.



AWNINGS AND CANOPIES

- Awnings and canopies should be placed at the top of openings, but they should not cover important architectural details or elements.
- Awnings and canopies should be of an appropriate size and scale in relation to the building's facade. Awnings should not cover more than one third (1/3) of the window opening.
- Fixtures should not extend across the facades of several buildings and should fit their openings.
- Colors on awnings and canopies should be considered carefully. Generally, colors should relate to a structure's overall color scheme.
- Awnings and canopies should be used to hide the housing of security mechanisms, when such devices are used.
- A canopy or other sunshade over a walkway is permitted in the front yard or any yard abutting a street. The canopy or sunshade may extend to within three (3) feet of the property line.



APPROPRIATE



NOT APPROPRIATE



SIGNS

GENERAL INFORMATION

All signs must adhere to [Title 20.18.470](#), in addition to the following:

- Off-premise signs, roof mounted and billboard signs are not permitted in the district.
- Applicants may install only one of the following two type of signs: freestanding or monument.
- Shingle signs are also permitted in addition to either sign type and will not be counted toward the allowable wall sign area limit.
- Blade signs are permitted as per [Title 20.18.470](#).
- Auxiliary signs are permitted to assist in the safe and efficient movement of pedestrians and vehicular traffic.
- Banners are prohibited, with the exception that they may be used for a period not exceeding ten (10) days for grand openings, festivals, and charitable functions only.

ILLUMINATION AND MOTION

COLOR AND DESIGN

Flashing and intermittent or moving lights are prohibited. Twirling, rotating, and revolving signs are prohibited. Design should be artistic, innovative, yet compatible with the building and the surrounding area.



NOT APPROPRIATE



SIGNS

FREESTANDING OR MONUMENT SIGNS

Freestanding or monument signs are only permitted in four instances:

- District identification
- Directory
- Parking lots or structures
- New construction.

In the case of parking lots and new construction, two (2) freestanding or monument signs are permitted on each site.

Each freestanding or monument sign may not exceed a maximum face area of seventy-two (72) square feet. The vertical dimension of the sign face should not exceed eight (8) feet.

Freestanding or monument signs constructed of plywood are not permitted.

Materials permitted for the construction of freestanding or monument signs must be of the same or compatible materials of the building for which the sign is intended.



SIGNS

WALL SIGNS INCLUDING CANOPY AND AWNINGS

All canopies or awnings installed in the Union Plaza District must also meet the guideline set forth on [page 23](#).

- The total area of wall signs may not exceed ten percent (10%) of the face area of the elevation of the building on which the signs are to be placed.
- A wall sign shall not project more than eighteen (18) inches, diagonally, from the face of the wall or the surface of a canopy or awning on which the sign is constructed.
- Wall signs shall not extend, vertically or horizontally beyond the edges of the building or structure on which they are attached.
- Every reasonable attempt must be made to preserve existing historic wall signs. They add to the theme of the district, and shall not be counted toward total sign limitations.



SIGNS

SHINGLE AND BLADE SIGNS

- Each shingle sign shall not exceed a minimum sign area of six (6) square feet.
- The bottom edge of a shingle must not be more than two (2) foot below the bottom edge of any canopy.
- The end of a shingle sign may not extend beyond the edge of any canopy.
- A shingle sign must be placed perpendicular to the front wall of the building.



APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

OVERVIEW

All applications for redevelopment of existing buildings or structures or new construction must comply with the **Union Plaza Design Guidelines**. The purpose of these guidelines is to protect business investments in the district from unsightly construction that would ultimately diminish the appeal of the district. Property owners and their design professionals (architects, builders, etc.) should consult these design guidelines as early as possible when planning a project.

All applications prior to submittal should review the **Code of Ordinances El Paso: Appendix A - Table of Permissible Uses**. Building use should be permitted under Special Purpose (U-P) Union Plaza.

P - Permitted
X - Not Permitted
D - Detailed Site Plan Required
S - Special Permit Required
A - Permitted Accessory Use



DESIGN REVIEW SUBMITTAL REQUIREMENTS DETAILED SITE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Prior to the issuance of any building or related permits for any new construction or renovation of the exterior of existing buildings and structures, drawings and applications shall first submit a Detailed Site Development Plan Application to comply with **Section 20.04.150** as part of a building permit application. A building permit may only be granted once a Detailed Site Development Plan has been submitted and approved. To ensure the proposed construction complies with these guidelines, reference the **Code of Ordinances El Paso Municode Union Plaza (U-P) section 20.10.360 Mixed-use development**.

DOWNLOAD APPLICATION - **Detailed Site Development Plan** (if required)

All documents shall be submitted to Planning & Inspections Department electronically through **Citizen Access Portal** and all payments should be paid through our One Stop Shop in person or online.

811 Texas Ave. El Paso, Texas 79901
 (915)212-0104
 OSSHelp@elpasotexas.gov

WHAT IS A PRE-SUBMITTAL REVIEW?

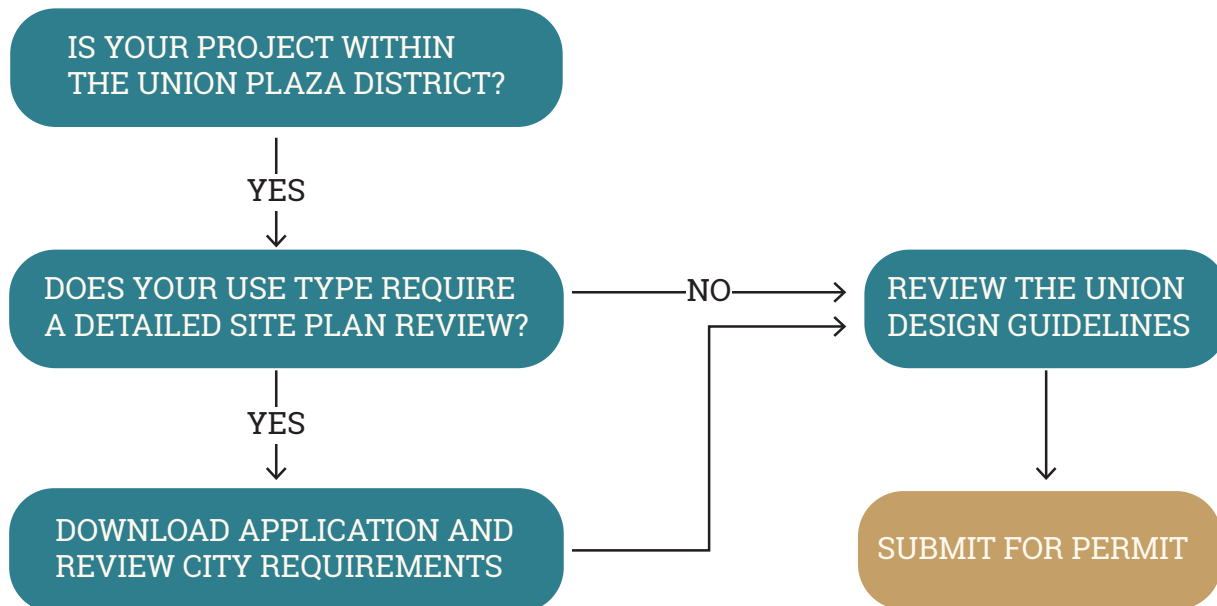
The pre-submittal review offers you and your team the opportunity to meet with City staff from various disciplines and ask questions about site requirements and construction code criteria. We use the pre-submittal review to identify the options you have moving forward with your project, helping you avoid issues or changes later in the process.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR A PRE-SUBMITTAL REVIEW?

Anyone with a proposed project in the City of El Paso, such as a new construction, renovation, additions, demolitions, etc. may request a pre-submittal review. The proposed project may be in any phase of the pre-submittal design, it can be anything from a rough conceptual idea.

HOW TO SCHEDULE A PRE-SUBMITTAL REVIEW?

To schedule a pre-submittal, email your [Pre-Submittal Review Application](#) online. Once application is submitted, you will receive an email for application payment.



For more information regarding this application, please contact the Planning and Inspections Department at (915) 212-01040 or visit our website at <https://www.elpasotexas.gov/planning-and-inspections>

DEFINITIONS

The following definitions are provided for purposes of this document only.

A

Accessible - An environment or facility that provides equal access to people with different abilities.

Active Street Frontage / Use - Street frontage that enables direct visual and physical contact between the street and the interior of the building. Clearly defined entrances, windows, and shop fronts are elements of the building façade that contribute to an active street frontage.

Amenities - A desirable or useful feature or facility of a building or place.

Architectural Rhythm - A strong, regular, repeated pattern of a design elements which can include building massing, architectural detailing, texture, and color.

Authentic - Not false or copied; genuine; real.

Awning - A roof like shelter of canvas or other material extending over a doorway, from the top of a window, over a deck, etc., in order to provide protection, as from the sun.

B

Buffer - To create a separation between dissimilar uses and/or development intensities, in an effort to reduce or mitigate the effects of one area upon the other.

Building Form - A specific style of building design or building feature(s).

C

Character - Features, qualities, and attributes that give a place its identity.

Context - The relationship between a location and its surrounding natural, built, and/or planned environment; the whole environment relevant to a particular building or place; the interrelated conditions in which something exists or occurs.

Condition - Refer to the physical state of a structure or object.

Continuity - Design similarities between two or more things that provides a connection between them.

D

Design District - Any zoning district or overlay district within which more specific architectural design elements are required.

Design Element - The use of colors, space, texture, and other components in an artistic representation.

DEFINITIONS

Design Feature - The arrangement or pattern of elements or features of an artistic or decorative work.

Development - The process of developing or being developed.

Durability - The ability to withstand wear, pressure, or damage.

E

Eave - The part of a roof that meets or overhangs the walls of a building.

Element - A component, part, or constituent of a whole.

Equity - The practice of ensuring that processes and practices are impartial, fair, and provide equal possible outcomes for everyone involved.

F

Façade - The front part or exterior of a building.

Frontage - The front façade of a building; area of public realm that is parallel to the front of a building.

M

Massing - The physical volume, shape, or bulk of a building.

Mixed-use - The practice of allowing more than one type of a land use in a building or set of buildings.

Mixed-use may be developed in a variety of ways, either horizontally in multiple buildings, vertically within the same building, or through a combination of the two.

Mobility - The ability to move from one place to another, or to transport goods or information from one place to another.

N

New Development - The business of constructing buildings or otherwise altering land for new uses.

P

Passive Design - Building design that uses site, vegetation, natural processes, elements, and material attributes coupled with building orientation, spatial placement, and materials selection to achieve human comfort and minimize resources and energy consumption and costs.

DEFINITIONS

Pedestrian Clear Width - Streets and public spaces that accommodate and encourage pedestrian activity through the provision of active uses, informal gathering spaces, lighting and safety features, and other pedestrian-serving amenities.

Pedestrian Corridor - A path or guided way that is developed to promote walking as an attractive means of transportation and utilized primarily by pedestrians as they move between major activity centers.

Pedestrian-Oriented Design - A form of development that makes the street environment inviting for pedestrians.

R

Right-of-Way - Land which by deed, conveyance, agreement, easement, dedication, usage, or process of law is reserved for or dedicated to the general public for street, highway, alley, public utility, pedestrian walkway, bike-way, or drainage purposes.

S

Sense of Place - The combination of characteristics that gives particular locations or areas a unique personality.

Setbacks - A distance from a curb, property line, or structure within which building is prohibited.

Site - The land on which a building or other feature is located.

Storm-water Element - Storm-water is rainwater plus anything the rain carries along with it. An element of storm-water is one in which it is specifically designed to capture, detain, and/or retain storm-water for cleaning or reuse.

Structure - Anything constructed or erected on the ground or attached to something having a location on the ground.

T

Transition Areas - A change from one development area to another, either in terms of height, density, intensity, or character - usually as a means to ensure compatibility between developments.

W

Wayfinding - Encompasses all of the ways in which people orient themselves in physical space and navigate from place to place, usually through the use of landmarks, effective signage, and building design.

