

Design Guidelines

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Introduction to Design Guidelines

Design Guidance In Lower Downtown

These design guidelines emerged from the Lower Downtown neighborhood planning process (1995-1998) and while they are not a part of the **Neighborhood Plan**, the principles upon which they rest are incorporated into the **Plan**. The sections found here that deal with **Contributing** and **Noncontributing Buildings** are not intended to be all-inclusive. The LPC's *Design Guidelines for Denver Landmarks and Landmark Districts* are the primary source for guidelines for **Contributing** and **Noncontributing Buildings**; these guidelines supplement them.

The sections of the Design Guidelines that deal with **Contemporary** and new buildings are more comprehensive and address many topics that are unique to Lower Downtown, commercial districts in general, or the requirements of modern technology and uses. Rather than supplementing existing guidelines, the guidelines for **Contemporary** and New Buildings fill a gap where very little guidance existed before.

To develop real property in Lower Downtown, the project proposer and development team must consult not only these guidelines, but also: Ordinance 109, as amended; the B-7 Zone District Ordinance, as amended; the LPC's *Design Guidelines for Denver Landmarks and Landmark Districts*; the Denver Comprehensive Plan; the **Streetscape Plan**; and the **Lower Downtown Neighborhood Plan**.

Language and Definitions

Definitions, acronyms and abbreviations used in the Design Guidelines follow. Words that are specifically defined herein are printed in **bold letters** wherever they are found.

Abut, Abutting. Immediately adjacent to, beside. Buildings are also abutting if they are separated by a public right-of-way (like an alley or street) upon which there are no intervening buildings.

Active commercial uses. Active commercial uses are those uses that promote the comings and goings of more than a few pedestrians on a regular basis.

Additional parking. **Additional parking** is parking which can be included in a project in addition to the **minimum parking** without special approval in the following amounts:

- One space per 1500 square feet for commercial uses
- One half space per unit for residential uses

Applicant: The proposer of alterations to existing buildings or construction of new buildings in the Historic District who has filed an application for review of the project by the LDD/DRB.

Articulation. How each element, such as a window, door, cornice, floor line, or column, is architecturally expressed □that is, called out as special or distinct from other elements □by the designer. This can be done through use of color, change of material or texture, and so on. The idea is to make these elements read differently from others while still retaining a pleasing composition overall.

Borrowed light basements. The interior first floor is set back by some means from the streetfront face to allow for light wells or skylights providing light into a habitable basement area. The result is to push the storefront and street-level windows some distance back from the sidewalk and pedestrians.

Building height. Building **height** is the **height** of a building as measured from a point defined in the city Zoning Ordinance and extending to the roof deck of the subject building, but not including parapets, cornices, elevator overruns, stair towers extending onto the roof, mechanical equipment or **mechanical penthouses**, certain architectural rooftop elements, or other such elements as discussed herein.

55 feet is the □**height-by-right**□ in Lower Downtown. Based on established criteria, the **LDD/DRB** may grant additional **height** up to a maximum of 85 feet, 100 feet, and in certain districts, 130 feet. For buildings above 55 feet that are not located in the **SRDs**, the **height** alone of a proposed building relative to its **context** may be considered a reason for denial of the project. For projects located in the **SRDs**, all elements of context must be addressed except that projects cannot be denied approval on the basis of height alone.

Compatibility, Compatible. **Compatibility**, or to be **compatible**, is a condition wherein two or more entities are combined to achieve desirable aftereffects for the whole and each other. It is the ability of different components, whether similar or dissimilar, to function together and stand together without disharmony or conflict (in other words, complementary but not necessarily similar or the same). The intent of the proposed guidelines is that new buildings should not replicate existing ones.

Context. **Context** consists of the conditions that form the setting within which a building is experienced. It derives from a Middle English word that meant □coherence,□ and there is an implication of disparate elements harmoniously woven together. As used here, **context** consists of all the external factors that have a formative influence on the appearance of an area, including height, mass, **massing**, **scaling elements**, design, materials, location on site, and so forth. Context applies to all sites.

In Lower Downtown, the **contributing buildings** in a proposed site's vicinity establish **context**. There are three types of **context**: primary, secondary and district-wide. Primary **context** is applied to **Part 1 decisions** in the design review process. Secondary **context** is used in **Part 2 decisions**. **District-wide context** is used when the **LDD/DRB** determines that there are no **contribution buildings** in a site's primary or secondary **context**.

Primary **context** is used to determine the general **height** and **massing** -- the envelope -- of a proposed building. It is established by the **contributing buildings** located within 300' in all directions from any point on the property line of a proposed site.

Secondary **context** is used to determine the finer grain details of a proposed building. The geographic parameters used to determine secondary **context** are as follows:

- X For sites on named streets, **context** is established by **contributing buildings** located on the face block on which the project is located, the face block immediately across the street and the face block across the alley.
- X For corner buildings, **context** is established by **contributing buildings** located one-half block in each direction from the corner, including both sides of each half block.
- X For sites on numbered streets, **context** is established by **contributing buildings** located the face block on which a project is located, the face block immediately across the street, and both face blocks on each of the blocks that **abut** the block of the proposed project.

For sites in which **context** is not provided due to the absence of proximate **contributing buildings**, **context** is the historic architectural character of the entire **District**.

Contemporary Buildings: See **contributing buildings**

Contributing, noncontributing, and contemporary buildings. **Contributing buildings** are those determined to be of historic significance. Determination was made in an authorized survey conducted by the City of Denver Landmark Preservation Commission and recorded within the designation of the Lower Downtown Historic District. A map identifying **contributing buildings** can be found in the ordinance establishing the **District**. Buildings considered **noncontributing** were not, at that time, found to be of historical significance. **Contemporary buildings** are buildings built after 1941.

De novo appeal: *De novo* is a legal term that refers to a trial which starts over, the same as if it had not been heard before and as if no decision previously had been rendered. As used in this **Plan**, a *de novo* appeal means that the **LPC** will not merely review the record from the **LDD/DRB**, but will take new evidence and hear the appeal issues again. The decision of the **LDD/DRB** will be given a presumption of correctness, but the **LPC** may make its own decision based on the information presented to it and its application of the guidelines to that information. Elements of a project that are the subject of an appeal must be presented to the **LPC** in the same form as those presented to the **LDD/DRB**.

Design vocabulary. The physical attributes, characteristics, and details that make up a building: put simply, the elements one can see when looking at the building. These include, at one extreme, the size, shape, color, and texture of its materials. At the other extreme is the way the building handles setbacks and the **articulation** of the **facade** or **elevation** through alignment of elements (such as windows, cornices, or columns). Further examples include texture, scaling elements, color, material changes, and window mullions and muntins.

Elevation, facade, and primary facade. **Facade**, or **primary elevation**, when used in conjunction with buildings, refers to any street-facing wall of a building, or a street wall. **Elevation** refers to the walls of a building that do not face the street, such as side or alley walls.

Excess parking. Excess parking is parking in an amount greater than the sum of (i) the minimum required parking (see MP8.1), and (ii) the additional parking (see MP8.2) permitted in any structure without the consent of the LDD/DRB. See also, minimum parking and additional parking.

Facade. See **Elevation**

Height. See **Building Height**

Human scale. See **Scale**

Mass, Massing. A building's **mass** is synonymous with its volume, or the total gross cubic volume of space it occupies on the site. **Massing** is the way in which its volume, or **mass**, is distributed on the site □ which parts are higher, lower, wider, or narrower, and what pops up and where. **Massing** is an important consideration in helping a building fit comfortably into its **context**. The aspects of a building's form include its visual treatment in the variations of **heights** and widths of its **mass**, as well as its overall **height** and stepbacks. Two buildings can have the same **mass** but entirely different **massings**. (See **Building height**).

Related to a building's **mass** is its width. Establishing visually appropriate building widths □ defined as the distance the **facade** of a single new building extends along the street without a break in **massing** □ is important to maintaining Lower Downtown's character. This break in the visual **massing** may be accomplished in any number of ways, including an expression of two distinct buildings, a break in a portion of the **facade** with a different function (such as a door or passageway), a change of wall plane (such as recessing part of a segment), a change of column spacing, or a change of materials, color, texture, or detailing.

Mechanical penthouse. See **Penthouse**

Minimum parking. For those structures subject to parking requirements, **minimum parking** is:

- One space per 750 square feet for commercial uses
- One space per unit for residential uses

Mixed use. **Mixed use** buildings are buildings with more than one use.

Noncontributing buildings. See **Contributing Buildings**

Part 1 approval, Part 1 decision. A decision made by the LDD/DRB in the process of reviewing and approving alterations to existing buildings or construction of new buildings. A decision that approves or denies an applicant's proposal for a project's the building envelope,

(defined as the building's height, mass, form, stepbacks, site plan, contextual fit, etc.), and the concept of the basic exterior facade appearances, including identification of major materials.

Part 2 approval, Part 2 decision. A decision made by the LDD/DRB in the process of reviewing and approving alterations to existing buildings or construction of new buildings. A decision that approves or denies an applicant's proposal for a project's building details. Such building details shall include materials, color, windows, entrances, scaling devices, and other exterior details.

Pedestrian friendly. "Pedestrian friendly" is a measure of the quality of an environment from the perspective of a person on foot. A **pedestrian friendly** environment is a place where people can enjoy public life in a comfortable setting. The Lower Downtown Neighborhood Plan seeks to foster this kind of an environment by recommending several community development strategies, including approaches to land use, building design, historic preservation, streetscape design, transportation, mobility, traffic management, parking, and economic development. For example, the **Plan's** design guidelines advance **pedestrian friendliness** through such things as build-to-property-line requirements, minimum and maximum **heights**, and **human scale** development, all of which serve to enclose and define public space and to create a pedestrian environment people understand and to which they can relate. **Mixed-use** development puts people and eyes on the street at all hours, helping to reduce crime and increase a feeling of security. Historic preservation adds interest to streets and a sense of place that, in turn, promotes use and enjoyment of the public realm. Streetscape elements provide amenities and convenience. Use of alternative modes of transportation reduces traffic entering the District. Parking strategies encourage a "park-once environment" where, upon arrival, it is possible to do a variety of things by walking between them. Taken together these elements, and others in the Neighborhood Plan, shape the District's urban structure to support pedestrian use, safety, comfort and enjoyment.

Penthouse, residential penthouse and mechanical penthouse. A structure or portion of a structure located on the roof of a building (a **penthouse** usually has its own roof as well). It is generally a roof element, and may or may not contain habitable space. Often it contains or hides building equipment. It is generally set back from the roof edge of the main part of the building and covers only a small portion of that roof.

For purposes of this document, a **residential penthouse** is any rooftop **penthouse** containing habitable space; a **mechanical penthouse** does not. Note, however, that not all mechanical equipment is placed inside a **penthouse**.

Period of significance. Lower Downtown's **period of significance** is established on the National Register of Historic Places to be from 1860 through 1941.

Primary facade. See **Elevation**

Residential penthouse. See **Penthouse**

Scale, human scale, and scaling elements. A visual concept regarding the relative size of a building's architectural parts compared to the whole or to the human figure, created by introducing into the design some unit that acts as a visual measuring rod.

There are many types of **scale**, **human scale** being most commonly used; even when a different **scale** is referred to, it always refers back to the **human scale**. For example, a cathedral or governmental building may have a seemingly bigger-than-life, or monumental, **scale**: its **scale** is altogether larger than the human figure, and is intended to be so as this results in a humbling effect on the observer. In a smaller-than-life, or miniature, **scale**, everyday things shrink down to less than what the observer would expect. A **scale** model an architectural design tool that represents a building prior to its construction is an extreme example of miniature **scale**. In our physical environment, miniature **scale** can be seen when, for example, a three-story building is squeezed into the **height** of what otherwise would have been a two-story building. This effort of a developer or designer to pick up an extra story can result in unsettling visual consequences.

A building will have **scale** (i.e., **human scale**) . . . if there are elements of it which can be (metaphorically) used as steps, through which the observer will intellectually reach, grasp, or comprehend the building. The steps in that sense are the elements of a building that are known to the observer, the elements with which he is familiar and whose dimensions one knows in relationship to oneself. (A. C. Antoniadis, *Architecture and Allied Design*, 3rd ed., Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co., 1992).

Scaling elements range from small items recognizable close-up, such as a unit of masonry, doorknob, or window muntin, to larger ones such as doors, windows, awnings, balconies, railings, and signs. The division of a building vertically (by expressing the floor lines in the construction) and horizontally (through column spacing) adds enormously to a viewer's ability to get a sense of how the building stacks up, how tall or wide it is, and how comfortable he or she feels with it.

A building without **scaling elements** can take on whole new meanings and create unsettling feelings. The more difficult it is to relate to a building as a human being, the more uncomfortable it makes the viewer to be near it. At worst, such a building may feel threatening or unfriendly, and thus be avoided. At best, the observer will be visually confused by the building and its relationship to him or her.

Scaling elements. See **Scale**

Screen, screening. To screen cars or parking means to visually obscure to a degree what is behind the screen. The intent is not to hide or make disappear the subject of the screening, but to diminish its prominence or push it visually into the background. The screen becomes the dominant focus instead of the subject behind it. A screen can be mostly solid or mostly transparent depending on the purpose it is to serve and the subject behind it.

Design Guidelines for Contributing Buildings

Principle 1. Preservation of Contributing Buildings

Additions, alterations to, and rehabilitation of **contributing buildings** shall retain and preserve the historic character of the building.

Policy 1.1 Facades and Primary Elevations

The removal, alteration, or replacement of features on the **facade** of an historic building must not alter the character of the building.

Recommendations:

1.1.1 Removal or alteration of historic features

Requirement: Removal of original materials or alteration of features and spaces that characterize a property shall be avoided.

1.1.2 Deteriorated historic features

Requirement: Deteriorated original features shall be repaired rather than replaced.

Requirement: Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, new features shall match the old in design, color, texture, and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials.

1.1.3 Replacement of missing features

Requirement: Replacement of missing features shall be documented for historical accuracy.

1.1.4 New Features

Requirement: New features that change the historic character of the building shall be denied approval.

1.1.5 Railings, walls, fences, and gates

Requirement: Railings, walls, fences, and gates shall be constructed from substantial materials.

Preference: Patios and decks should be sized in relation to the existing building.

1.1.6 Balconies

Preference: New balconies should be prohibited on **primary facades** and rooftop additions.

Policy 1.2 Alleys and side elevations

Alleys and side **elevations** of historic buildings are an integral part of the character of a building.

Recommendations:

1.2.1 Subordination to primary facade

Requirement: Alley and side **elevations**, while important, must remain subordinate to the **primary facade** or other street wall **elevation**.

1.2.2 Alterations to alleys and side elevations

Requirement: Alterations to alleys and side **elevations** shall not alter one's ability to perceive the building's historic character.

Policy 1.3 Major Additions

Additions to historic structures should be unobtrusive, and should not overwhelm the building.

Recommendations:

1.3.1 Intensity of Review

Requirement: Review of the design of a proposed addition to an historic structure shall be as intensive as for alterations to street **facades**.

1.3.2 Design, materials, and color

Requirement: Design, materials, and color shall be consistent with the district's historic **context**.

Preference: Additions and alterations should defer to than the original structure.

Policy 1.4 Rooftop additions

Rooftop additions must be subordinate to the historic structure on which they are located.

Recommendations:

1.4.1 Design Considerations

Requirement: Rooftop additions shall remain visually subordinate to the building.

Requirement: Rooftop additions shall have a **compatible** and proportional relationship with the historic building and shall not change its character.

1.4.2 Stepbacks

Preference: Rooftop additions should stepback a minimum of 15' from the facade of the building.

1.4.3 Height

Requirement: Rooftop additions shall be no higher than 20' above the roof deck of the building.

Preference: Rooftop additions should be one story structures with a maximum height of 15'.

Policy 1.5 Awnings

The design of awnings and the materials used are related to the style and use of the buildings they are placed on.

Recommendations:

1.5.1 Retail Storefronts

Preference: Where traditional retail storefronts exist or will be replaced, canvas awnings should be used.

1.5.2 Industrial or Warehouse Buildings

Preference: Where industrial or warehouse architecture exists, more latitude should be allowed in the awning materials and design.

Policy 1.6 Historic Wall Signs

Historic wall signs should be preserved.

Design Guidelines for Non-Contributing and Contemporary Buildings

Principle 2. Alterations to Noncontributing Buildings

Alterations to **noncontributing buildings** should be designed to help the building better fit its **context**.

Policy 2.1 Change to Contributing Status

A **noncontributing building** built within the **period of significance** but substantially altered may be reclassified as a **contributing building**, but it must be brought into compliance with its original historic facade by means of restoration or replication.

Recommendations:

Requirement: Project proposers who seek contributing status for noncontributing structures shall comply with the guidelines and standards set forth by the Secretary of the Interior.

Requirement: Project proposers who seek contributing status for noncontributing structures shall comply with the guidelines of the Landmark Preservation Commission and the **LDD/DRB**.

Requirement: The restoration or replication must be documented for authenticity.

Policy 2.2 Building Additions and Alterations

Additions to and alterations of **noncontributing buildings** should be designed to harmonize with the original building and to help the finished project better fit its **context**.

Recommendations:

2.2.1 Relationship of addition to original building

Preference: Additions should be sympathetic and subordinate to the original design of the building.

2.2.2 Relationship of finished building to **context**.

Preference: Additions should help the finished building better fit its **context**.

Principle 3. Alterations of Contemporary Buildings.

A **contemporary building** should remain an expression of its time.

Policy 3.1 Facade Alterations

Facade alterations should be sympathetic and subordinate to the original design of the building.

Policy 3.2 Building Additions

Building additions should be sympathetic and subordinate to the building's **context**.

Policy 3.3 Applicable Guidelines

Guidelines for new buildings shall apply to **contemporary buildings**.

Design Guidelines for New Buildings

Principle 4. Building Height and Massing

Height and **massing** are important determinants of **compatibility**.

Policy 4.1. Building Heights

To encourage new buildings and additions to existing buildings to reflect their **context**, the guidelines below specify requirements and preferences regarding **heights** of new buildings.

Recommendations:

4.1.1 Measuring **heights**

Requirement: In all cases, the **height** of a building shall be measured according to the Denver Zoning Code, except that measurement shall be to the roof deck at the street **facade(s)**.

4.1.2 Minimum **heights**

Preference: Buildings facing the 16th Street Mall should be at least four stories tall.

Preference: All other new buildings should be at least two stories tall.

4.1.3 Maximum **height**

Requirement: Maximum **height** shall be 55 feet (not counting rooftop elements), except as provided as follows:

4.1.3.1 Modest Exceptions

The **LDD/DRB** may grant a modest exception to the 55-foot **height** limit if the exception helps the proposed new building to be more in **context** with the nearby buildings due to alignments of cornices, windows, or sill or story courses. A modest exception does not exceed five feet.

4.1.3.2 The Eighty-five Foot Exception

The **LDD/DRB** may grant an exception to the 55-foot **height** limit of up to an additional 30 feet, under the following conditions:

Requirement: The building must include residential uses in a minimum amount equal to the floor area over the 55-foot limit; these residential uses may be located anywhere in the building.

Requirement: The building must be in context.

Requirement: All other design guidelines for new construction shall apply to projects eligible for the eighty-five foot exception.

4.1.3.3 The Fifteen Foot Residential Penthouse Exception

The **LDD/DRB** may grant an exception of up to an additional 15 feet to the 85 foot **height** limit under the following conditions:

Height

The combined total height of the building and the residential penthouse may not penetrate the area above 100 feet.

Use

The **penthouse** shall be used exclusively for residential or residential support purposes.

Coverage

Maximum roof coverage shall not exceed one third of the roof deck.

Stepbacks

- X A stepback of at least 15 feet from any public street shall be required.
- X For buildings more than 75 feet wide, a stepback of at least 15 feet shall be required on side **elevations**.
- X Stepbacks on alleys shall be a minimum of 15 feet; the stepback can be reduced by one foot for each foot the building is set back from the alley lot line.
- X Stepbacks shall be measured from the outside face of, and perpendicular to, the exterior wall at which they begin.

Compatibility

The **penthouse** shall be **compatible** with the rest of the building and with the building's context.

All other design guidelines for new construction shall apply to **Residential Penthouses**.

4.1.3.4 The 130 Foot Exception

The **LDD/DRB** may grant an exception to the 55-foot **height** limit of up to an additional 75 feet, under the following conditions:

Special Review Districts

In the following specially designated areas, building **height** may increase to 130 feet:

- The Market Street District - 18th Street to 19th Street, from the alley between Larimer and Market streets to the alley between Market and Blake streets.
- The 16th Street Mall District - The first four lots on the north east side of 16th Street from the alley between Larimer and Market streets to Market Street, and the first four lots on the south west side of 16th Street from the alley between Larimer and Market streets to the alley between Blake and Wazee streets.
- The Postal Annex District - The postal annex block and the blocks to the south and west of it as far as the B-7 zone line

(For a discussion of the relationship between height and context in the **SRDs**, see Item B, Historic Preservation Section, Lower Downtown Neighborhood Plan.)

Requirements

With the exception of height, the building must be in context.

When the building abuts a **contributing building** of 85 feet tall or less, the building shall not be higher than 85 feet for a horizontal distance of 25 feet from the **contributing building**.

The proposed building shall be constructed of superior-quality materials.

The building shall include residential uses in a minimum amount equal to the floor area over 55 feet, configured in any manner.

If the building is in the 16th Street Mall District,

- it shall have entrances onto the mall.

- it shall be subject to the ☐Sunlight on the Mall☐ provisions of the zoning ordinance.
- it shall include residential uses in a minimum amount equal to the floor area over 85 feet, configured in any manner.
- the street level shall be devoted to retail space or art galleries.

If the building is in the Postal Annex District,

- the portion that **abuts** the 16th Street Mall shall be subject to the “Sunlight on the Mall” provisions.
- the portion that **abuts** the 16th Street Mall shall be devoted to retail space or art galleries.
- the portion that **abuts** Cherry Creek shall be subject to view corridor setbacks.

Projects eligible for the 130 foot exception shall be subject to special review procedures.

Residential or **mechanical penthouses** shall not penetrate the plane above 130 feet.

In addition to these requirements, all other design guidelines for new construction shall apply to projects proposed for any of the special review districts.

4.1.4 Appearance of **height** in stories

Preference: The exterior expression of the 55-foot-high building should read as up to four stories.

Preference: The exterior expression of the 85-foot-high building should read as up to six stories.

4.1.5 **Height** of rooftop structures and appurtenances

Requirement: No roof structure or appurtenance (e.g., elevator, **mechanical penthouse**, telecommunications equipment, stair towers, or mechanical equipment) shall exceed 15 feet in **height**, with the following exceptions:

- The **LDD/DRB** may grant a modest exception to the 15-foot limitation for elevator overruns and where the applicant demonstrates unusual conditions.
- The **LDD/DRB** may grant exceptions to the 15-foot limitation for certain roof structures and appurtenances. These include, but are not limited to, steeples, clock towers, water towers, or other significant architectural features.

Requirement: No roof structure or appurtenance (e.g., elevator, **mechanical penthouse**, telecommunications equipment, stair towers, or mechanical equipment) shall be closer than 15 feet to the street facade of the building, except that the **LDD/DRB** may grant a

modest exceptions to the 15-foot setback if the applicant demonstrates unusual conditions.

Requirement: No roof structure or appurtenance may penetrate the 100' plane except ornamental features.

Policy 4.2. Building Massing

Strong features of Lower Downtown's physical character are the rectilinear and blocky nature of its existing buildings and the area's block-alley-block pattern. New buildings shall be designed such that their **massing** is consistent and **compatible** with the historical **context**. Building **height** and building widths, and variations in them, are important aspects of **massing**.

Recommendations:

4.2.1 Variations in **height**

Preference: For a single building whose site is more than 100 feet in width along the street facade, height should be varied.

Preference: The variation of **height** should take place in 18- to 30-foot horizontal increments.

4.2.2 Appearance of widths

Preference: The maximum width of a building or building segment along a named street should be 100 feet.

Requirement: Buildings shall not block alleys.

Requirement: The design of a facade shall not extend across alleys.

Requirement: Upper-level connections across alleys shall be consistent in size and location with existing historic connections.

Requirement: Upper-level connections across alleys shall be set back from the **facades** of the buildings which they connect.

Preference: Upper level connections should be primarily for the purpose of circulation.

Preference: Upper level connections should not exceed twenty five feet in width.

Principle 5. Building Design

The placement of architectural elements, that is, the **articulation** of visual features and forms, is very important to building in continuity and to the Lower Downtown physical experience. New building **facades** shall express the characteristic **articulation** of these features and forms in a manner **compatible** with the historic **context**. Other visible **elevations**—such as walls found in alleys or side walls of buildings—can be seen easily and contribute significantly to the overall impression of the built environment.

Policy 5.1. Street Walls

Building placement on the site and the continuity of **facades** along the streets must reinforce the tradition of Lower Downtown's historic building fabric.

Recommendations:

5.1.1 Continuity of street wall facade

Requirement: A continuous street wall shall be constructed along property lines facing public streets.

Preference: There should not be a setback in the facade below 55 feet.

Preference: Elements of a storefront's walls may be recessed up to 2 feet from the property line.

Preference: A storefront entry may be recessed 5 feet from the property line, or 3 feet from the face of the store front if the storefront has been recessed up to 2 feet.

Preference: Decorative elements that extend beyond the facade should be permitted.

Preference: Decorative elements that extend beyond the facade should not become a dominant feature of **facades**.

Preference: Decorative elements that extend beyond the **facade** should not extend to the ground level.

5.1.2 Corner buildings

Requirement: The quality of design and materials for both street walls is equally important.

Requirement: Buildings located on corners at the intersection of streets shall emphasize the corner.

5.1.3 Floor-to-floor heights

Floor-to-floor heights as stated here serve facade-expression purposes (i.e., how the building looks from the street) and are not intended to be taken literally as measurements from an actual floor to an actual floor.

Preference: Street level minimum: 14 feet
Upper level minimum: 11 feet *

Preferences: Street level maximum: 20 feet
Upper level maximum: 14 feet

* See Design of Free-Standing Parking Structures, Rec. 9.2.2 for parking garage exception.

5.1.4 Borrowed light basements

Requirement: **Borrowed light basements** shall not be permitted.

Policy 5.2. Non-Street Wall Elevations

Buildings often have more than one or two sides visible to the street; walls may also be visible from nearby buildings or rooftops. All visible **elevations** are crucial to Lower Downtown's character, and walls must be designed accordingly.

Historically, alley **facades** were the backs of buildings: where deliveries were made and trash disposed of. Their designs were a lesser priority than those of street **facades**, and they often looked more cluttered with smaller windows and a variety of materials, textures, setbacks, doors, docks and colors. In addition, alleys provided light and air. Today, alleys are well-used for many of the same purposes, but design treatment along them must also respect and respond to new uses, such as greater pedestrian activity, and to views from shops, restaurants, residences, and offices.

Recommendations:

5.2.1 Design of visible sidewall elevations

Requirement: Sidewall **facades**, whether seen from the street or nearby buildings, shall continue to reflect the **context** in which they exist and shall be **compatible** with the architecture of the street **facades**.

5.2.2 Alley elevations

Preference: Alley **elevations** should not be treated as **primary facades** and should be permitted greater freedom of expression than **primary** street wall **facades**.

Preference: Considerations should be made for providing trash enclosures and delivery areas, as well as fire escapes and electrical, telephone, and CATV pedestals, all of which take up considerable space that should not occupy alley rights-of-way.

Policy 5.3. Facade Compositions

A building's **scale**, **articulation** and definition are critical factors in determining how well it fits its **context**.

Recommendations:

5.3.1 Building **articulation** and definition

Requirement: A building's expression shall be composed of a base, a middle, and a top.

Requirement: The base shall include the street-level story or the first and second stories together.

Requirement: Building entries shall be articulated.

Requirement: The building shall have a consistent, **articulated** bay rhythm.

Preference: Vertical elements, such as columns, arches, vertical windows, and others, are strongly encouraged.

Preference: Architectural features, such as windows and doors, doorways, and courses, should be delineated.

Preference: The building should have a well-**articulated** top.

5.3.2 Windows

Requirement: Windows shall be recessed at least □one brick□width.

Requirement: Windows shall have sills.

Requirement: Windows shall have transparent, nontinted, and nonreflective glass.

Requirement: Reflective or tinted film shall not be applied to glass.

Requirement: Window openings shall have vertical proportions.

Requirement: Window openings shall not create horizontal bands across **facades**.

Requirement: A minimum of two-thirds of the horizontal and vertical dimensions of street-level **facades** shall be transparent.

Preference: Street-level windows should be of the storefront or divided-light industrial types, with sills, and should begin no higher than two-and-a-half feet above the sidewalk.

Preference: Operable windows should be used above the first floor.

5.3.3 Balconies

Requirement: Balconies shall not be a dominant feature of **facades**.

Requirement: Balconies shall be located above the building's base.

Preference: Balconies should not be placed on **primary facades** below 55 feet.

Requirement: Balconies shall contribute to the horizontal and vertical expression of the building.

Requirement: Balconies shall not be continuous across the entire facade or elevation of the building.

Requirement: Railings on balconies shall be transparent.

Preference: Balconies should not exceed 10 feet in length

Preference: Balconies should not be set back into the facade of the building.

Preference: Balconies should not project more than 5 feet from the facade.

5.3.4 Scale

Requirement: Building **facades** shall be designed with appropriate **human scale** and **scaling elements**.

Preference: **Scaling elements** may include, but are not limited to, expressions of materials by means of texture, color, and size; **articulation** of floor lines and structural grids; attention to details, including **articulation** of doors, windows, and balconies; **articulation** of cornices and banding; use of color changes; and streetfront or storefront **articulation**, including the use of awnings, canopies, signs, transoms, and kick plates.

Principle 6. Architectural Details, Materials, and Colors

A building's materials, details, and colors are important factors in establishing its **compatibility** with its **context**.

Policy 6.1. Details and Elements

Appropriate use and detailing of architectural elements help create a building that is comfortable in its **context**.

Recommendations:

6.1.1 Architectural Elements

Preference: The use of expressive architectural elements is encouraged. Examples include varied materials, columns, decorative relief, arches, and elaborate cornices and parapets.

Policy 6.2. Materials and Craftsmanship

The materials currently existing in Lower Downtown are predominantly walls of brick masonry—usually left natural, but sometimes painted.

Recommendations:

6.2.1 Materials

Requirement: Traditional masonry (e.g., brick, stone, terra-cotta tile, or ceramic tile) shall be used for street **facades**.

Preference: Also appropriate are certain constrained uses of metals, such as steel lintels, —cast iron— columns, metal decorative elements, and wood trim at storefronts.

Preference: Nontraditional materials used on street **facades** should be **compatible** with the historic **context**.

6.2.2 Craftsmanship

Preference: High quality craftsmanship is encouraged.

Policy 6.3. Color

Color plays an important role in Lower Downtown, and attention must be paid to its use on the building.

Recommendations:

6.3.1 Painted Masonry

Preference: Masonry should not be painted.

6.3.2 Bright Colors

Preference: Bright colors should only be used for accents and decorative details such as window details, storefronts, and entrances.

Design Guidelines for All Buildings

Principle 7. Building Signs, Awnings, and Lighting

Building signs, awnings, and lighting play an important role in helping establish the perceived liveliness and safety of Lower Downtown street life.

Policy 7.1. Signs

Building signs can do much to create a lively streetscape.

Recommendations:

7.1.1 Design

Requirement: All signs shall meet the requirements of the B-7 Zone District and the Vital Signs Ordinance.

Requirement: All signs, both flat and projecting, shall be in **scale** with and in proportion to the building.

Preference: Projecting signs should be sculptural, three dimensional, vibrant, smaller signs, and not the primary advertising signage.

Preference: Projecting signs should be a maximum of 3 feet by 4 feet.

Preference: Diverse signage - including wall signs, projecting signs, and window signs - should be encouraged.

Preference: Signs lit by historic type fixtures, such as goosenecks, should be encouraged.

7.1.2 Placement

Requirement: Wall signs shall fit within the building's facade.

Preference: Storefront signs should be located in the sign band of the **façade** to avoid obscuring architectural details.

Preference: The location, material, size, color, and lettering style of multiple storefront signs on single buildings should be coordinated.

Preference: Signs identifying businesses or buildings should be located on windows or doors.

Preference: Painted letters or free-hanging neon signs should be used for window signage.

7.1.3 Materials

Requirement: Internally lit boxes with plastic or glowing faces or letters shall not be permitted.

Requirement: A plastic look shall not be permitted.

Policy 7.2. Awnings

Awnings are like eyebrows over storefront windows: they help shade the merchandise from harsh sunlight and the observer from glare.

Materials, configuration, dimensions, and location of awnings must be appropriate to the building

Recommendations:

7.2.1 Design

Requirement: Awnings shall be designed as integral elements of building **façade**.

Preference: Awnings should be a minimum of three feet deep (front to back).

Preference: Awnings should be functional, actually offering people and merchandise shelter from rain and sun.

7.2.2 Placement

Preference: A continuous band of awning should not obscure architectural details.

7.2.3 Materials

Requirement: Awnings shall be constructed of traditional materials, such as fabric, metal and glass.

Requirement: Plastic awnings shall not be permitted.

Policy 7.3. Lighting

All exterior lighting shall be of a relatively low level in keeping with the overall historic character of Lower Downtown.

Recommendations:

7.3.1 Floodlighting

Requirement: General floodlighting of any exterior building surface is not permitted.

7.3.2 Signage Illumination

Requirement: All exterior illumination of a building surface shall be directed toward approved signage only and shall originate from fixtures that are in keeping with the historic character of the building upon which they are mounted.

7.3.3 Exterior Downlighting

Lighting of sidewalk surfaces shall be generally discouraged except at defined dining areas. Within these areas, lighting shall be kept at the lowest possible level.

Principle 8. Rooftops and Mechanical Elements

All roof structures and appurtenances (e.g., elevators, **mechanical penthouses**, stair towers, and mechanical equipment) must work within the overall design of the building. They also offer opportunities to enhance the building's overall architectural effect.

Policy 8.1. General Design Considerations

Rooftop elements pose special problems: historically, most were not screened, but neither were they generally visible from the street due to high cornices.

Recommendations:

8.1.1 Rooftop Elements

Requirement: Rooftop and mechanical elements shall not be placed on **penthouses**.

Preference: Rooftop elements should be neutral, unless another approach can be demonstrated as superior

Preference: Rooftop elements should be neutral unless they are a significant part of the facade or elevation design.

8.1.2 Placement

Requirement: Rooftop vents and other equipment that generates noise or odors shall be located away from neighboring residences or pedestrians.

Requirement: Noise from equipment, such as air conditioning units and cooling towers, shall comply with City ordinance.

Preference: If a **mechanical penthouse** enclosure is to be used to minimize noise from rooftop equipment, it should be integrated into the building's rooftop design.

8.1.3 Height Limits

Requirement: **Height** limits for general roof structures and appurtenances are subject to provisions found in Policy 4.1.

8.1.4 Expression

Preference: A wider range of forms and expression should be encouraged on **mechanical penthouses** than on the building proper.

Policy 8.2 Telecommunications Equipment

Like other non-decorative rooftop appurtenances, telecommunications equipment must be unobtrusive.

Recommendations:

8.2.1 Placement

Requirement: Mounting telecommunications equipment shall be prohibited on the facade of any building.

Requirement: If telecommunications equipment is to be roof mounted, it shall be no closer than 15 feet from the street facade of the building.

Requirement: If telecommunications equipment is to be wall mounted, it shall be permitted only on the face of roof top appurtenances (stair, elevator, mechanical enclosures, etc.)

8.2.2 Height

Requirement: The **height** of telecommunications equipment shall not exceed the maximum **height** applicable to rooftop appurtenances. (See Design Guidelines for New Buildings, Rec. 4.1.5)

Requirement: The **height** of antennas, equipment boxes and screening shall remain below a view plane which starts at the outside edge of the parapet and slopes back and up at a 45 degree angle.

8.2.3 Screening

Requirement: All equipment, roof and wall mounted, shall be grouped and **screened** (top and sides) within a single enclosure.

Requirement: **Screen** color shall match the basic building or roof top appurtenance color.

Design Guidelines for Parking Uses

Principle 9. Parking Structures and Parking in Other Buildings.

It is important that parking garages and parking located in **mixed use** buildings be compatible with their **context** as defined in Lower Downtown's Neighborhood Plan.

Policy 9.1. Considerations for All Parking Uses.

Space devoted to automobiles must contribute as much as possible to pleasant pedestrian experiences along Lower Downtown's streets.

Recommendations:

9.1.1 Design

Preference: Parking should be located underground.

Requirement: On street-facing **elevations**, parking uses at grade or on the first level up shall be set back from the property lot lines a minimum of 16 feet.

Requirement: The set back from the street-facing property lot line to the start of the parking use shall be designed for retail or **active commercial uses**.

Preference: Above ground level, wrapping of parking uses with other uses is encouraged.

Requirement: Sloped ramps shall not be expressed on any **facade** of a building.

Preference: **Facades** enclosing parking uses should be attractive and **compatible** with surrounding buildings.

9.1.2 Screening

To **screen** cars or parking means to visually obscure to a degree what is behind the **screen**. The intent is not to hide or make disappear the subject of the **screening**, but to diminish its prominence or push it visually into the background. The **screen** becomes the dominant focus instead of the subject behind it. A **screen** can be mostly solid or mostly transparent depending on the purpose it is to serve and the subject behind it.

Requirement: Parking ramps and parked cars shall be **screened** from public view and adjacent buildings.

Requirement: Top level parking shall be **screened**.

Preference: **Screening** of top level parking should result in a visually interesting roofscape.

9.1.3 Lighting

Requirement: To prevent glare, interior and exterior building lighting shall be **screened** from view from within neighboring buildings and from sidewalks.

Requirement: Car headlamps shall be **screened** from view from within neighboring buildings from sidewalks.

Requirement: Rooftop lighting shall be directed and **screened**.

Preference: Low level lighting on rooftops is preferred over pole lights.

9.1.4 Access

Requirement: Stairs and elevators that serve parking uses shall direct people to a prominent, well lit, and attractive pedestrian entries/exits to the street.

Requirement: Pedestrian entries shall be separate from vehicular entries.

Requirement: Curb cuts shall not flare.

Preference: Automobile ingress and egress should be located away from intersections.

Preference: Automobile ingress and egress should be located on the street with the least pedestrian traffic.

9.1.5 Mitigation Requirement

Requirement: Noise, light, and air pollution shall be mitigated.

Policy 9.2 Design of Free-Standing Parking Structures

Free-standing parking structures must meet the same design guidelines as other buildings, as well as those applicable to parking structures in general, and the following special provisions:

Recommendations:

9.2.1 Maximum Height

Requirement: The maximum **height** of a free-standing parking structure shall be 55'.

9.2.2 Floor-to-floor heights

Requirement: The exterior expression of parking structures shall reflect minimum floor-to-floor **heights** on the first floor. (See Design Guidelines for New Buildings, Rec. 5.1.4)

Preference: On floors above the first floor, minimum floor-to-floor **heights** may vary from floor-to-floor **height** guidelines for other structures. (See Design Guidelines for New Buildings, Rec. 5.1.4)

9.2.3 Openings

Preference: Openings need not be glazed.

Preference: In the absence of storefronts on the ground level, architectural grillwork or other architecturally interesting, articulated walls are encouraged for non-street wall elevations.

9.2.4 Siting of parking structures

Preference: Parking structures should be neither less than 125 feet nor greater than 200 feet in width along a named street.

Preference: Use of corner sites for parking structures is discouraged.

Requirement: If a free-standing parking structure is constructed on a corner site, any ground floor street-facing **elevations** shall be wrapped in retail or other **active commercial use**.

Requirement: If a free-standing parking structure is constructed on a corner site, any street-facing second floor **elevations** must be wrapped in other than parking uses.

Policy 9.3 Design of parking areas in mixed use buildings

In other than freestanding parking structures, the design of parking areas must be an integral element of the structure and shall comply, to the extent feasible, with guidelines for parking structures.

Recommendations:

9.3.1 Maximum floor area for parking uses

Requirement: No parking above grade shall occupy more than 50% of the gross floor area of a structure.

9.3.2 Parking uses above ground

Preference: Parking use should occur only at or below ground level.

Policy 9.4 Design of parking areas that abut existing residential uses.

Managing the impacts of parking uses on neighboring residential uses requires sensitive and creative design.

Recommendations:

9.4.1 Mitigation Requirement

Requirement: Noise, light, and air pollution shall be mitigated where residential occupancies **abut** parking uses, directly, across the street, or across the alley.

Preference: That portion of those walls located within 20 feet of residential units should not have open-to-the-air wall penetrations.

Preference: Those walls that face residential units should provide visual interest and vitality the entire length of the facade.

Policy 9.5 Off-street Parking

The design goal of parking in Lower Downtown is to meet the needs of the neighborhood's users without causing the profile of buildings to negatively impact the historic character of the District.

Design Guidelines for the Public Realm

Many of the principles, policies, requirements, and preferences stated below apply to both the public realm and the private sector. The importance of public seating, for example—the reasons for it, locations for it, and its design and nature—can be applied to the outdoor spaces that accompany privately owned buildings in Lower Downtown.

Quite often, too, improvements in the public realm will be paid for and designed by developers whose properties **abut** a public sidewalk, street, or alley. It is important that the developer understand what is expected in the course of developing the property.

Principle 10 Streets and Sidewalks

Lower Downtown's streets and sidewalks are its primary —open spaces— and the sites of most social contacts—a result, in part, of the ease of walking in Lower Downtown. Providing innumerable opportunities for meeting and visiting with friends and strangers, the many sidewalks and streets are also, in effect, the —living rooms— of the neighborhood.

Policy 10.1 Pedestrian Friendly Design

An active street is one of the primary goals of all the design guidelines. If a building cannot provide such opportunities at the time it is to be constructed, the building should be designed for future transition to such **active uses**.

Recommendations:

10.1.1 First Floor **Facades**

Requirement: The first floor **facade** of a building shall be designed to be **pedestrian friendly**.

10.1.2 Housing and Office Uses at Street Level

Preference: If housing is to be accommodated on the street-level, live/work spaces rather than live-only spaces should be provided.

Preference: If office use is to be accommodated on the street-level, uses with active foot traffic and display windows are encouraged.

Policy 10.2 Streetscapes

The City of Denver's *Streetscape Design Guidelines for Lower Downtown* includes a master plan for curb-to-curb street widths and the widths of sidewalks, as well as for street trees and

lighting. Every property abutting public rights-of-way is required to meet certain development standards.

Recommendations:

10.2.1 Streetscape Development Agreements

Requirement: All new and redeveloping buildings shall have an approved Streetscape Development Agreement that complies with the *Streetscape Design Guidelines for Lower Downtown*.

10.2.2 Materials

Preference: Concrete, brick, and stone should be used for sidewalk paving.

Preference: The stone blocks and cobblestones found in Lower Downtown's streets should be preserved.

Policy 10.3 Public Seating

Public seating is a crucial factor in a "civil" cityscape: no one should wander the streets—whether shopping, chatting, or eating—without a place to rest. To suit its purpose, seating must be well thought-out and properly placed. But because seating in a city center is often so rare, most people "... will sit where there are places to sit" (William H. Whyte, *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*).

Recommendations:

10.3.1 Provide seating

Preference: Seating, in the form of benches, planters, kiosks, leaning rails, or other workable elements should be provided in sufficient quantities and at appropriate locations.

10.3.2 Design

Preference: Seating should be at least 16 inches deep, or, if the seating has backs, 14 inches deep with the backs at least 12 inches high.

Preference: Seating heights should not be less than 12 inches nor more than 30 inches above the adjacent walking surface.

Policy 10.4 Sidewalk Merchant Zones

The sidewalk is the realm of the pedestrian. But other uses can peacefully coexist, provided certain considerations are made and rules followed.

Recommendations:

10.4.1 Restaurants and dining

Requirement: Railings shall enclose dining areas.

Requirement: No features of a dining area shall overhang the boundary defined in its revocable permit.

Requirement: Railing design shall be reviewed and approved by the **LDD/DRB**.

10.4.2 Other sidewalk vendors

Requirement: Sidewalk vendors shall not block the pedestrian way.

Requirement: Sidewalk vendors shall not despoil the sidewalks with grease, litter or other debris.

Principle 11 Alleys

Attention to alleys is essential to maintaining Lower Downtown’s historic character. Alleys are a part of the Lower Downtown open-space network and, like streets and sidewalks, play a vital role in the circulation of the district. And like streets, they offer opportunities for spontaneity and a variety of experiences.

Policy 11.1 The Importance of Alleys

Alleys are a critical thread in the district’s fabric and thus must be preserved, enhanced, and used.

Recommendations:

11.1.1 Alleys must be alleys

Requirement: Alleys shall remain open for public use.

Requirement: Alleys shall offer the primary access to a building’s services—including trash collection, deliveries and pick-ups, and electrical transformers, TV cable, telephone, and other utilities—as well as access to limited parking.

Requirement: The lighting of alleys shall keep safety in mind without permitting glare into nearby residential units.

11.1.2 Alleys offer opportunities for adjacent properties

Preference: Buildings should open onto alleys.

Preference: Open spaces or courtyards off alleys should be open visually to the alleys.

Principle 12. Open Spaces

Open spaces—such as parks or simply “leftover” spaces in the urban fabric—nearly all have the potential to be well-used outdoor places.

These guidelines apply both to public open space (e.g., on public property or rights-of-way) and to private open space (e.g., plazas or courtyards between buildings or inside a building complex with some public access).

Policy 12.1. Open Space Design Criteria

Open spaces are necessary and valuable in the urban **context**, but they are not all equally good. Making a good open-space area takes considerable thought and design.

Recommendations:

12.1.1 General considerations

Requirement: All private open-space plans shall be approved by the **LDD/DRB**.

Preference: Open spaces, as defined herein, should provide opportunities for seating, landscaping, and varieties of paving.

Preference: Breezes and sunlight, where an element of the environment, should be incorporated into open space design.

Preference: Opportunities for food and eating should be offered wherever possible.

12.1.2 Open spaces and buildings

Requirement: All open spaces shall be considered an integral part of a project’s design.

Requirement: Buildings facing onto open space shall support and contribute to that open space in its functional and facade design, especially at ground level.

Preference: Generally, the greater the degree of enclosure, the greater the participant’s feeling of being a part of the open space.

Preference: A building's width and **height** should both contribute to an open space's feeling of proper enclosure.

Preference: Reflected light from nearby buildings should be incorporated into open space design.

Principle 13. Public Art

Public art is that extra something that brings people together for a moment or longer, sparks conversation, and enlivens the urban experience for all.

Policy 13.1. Encourage Public Art

Private and public property owners and developers should investigate all opportunities and, where feasible, should incorporate art into their projects.