COMMERCIAL
CITYWIDE DESIGN GUIDELINES

Pedestrian-Oriented/Commercial & Mixed-Use Projects

Objective 1: Consider Neighborhood Context and Linkages in Building and Site Design



Los Angeles Department of City Planning

citywide design guidelines

OBJECTIVE 1:
Consider Neighborhood Context and Linkages In Building and Site Design

Site Planning

1 Create a strong street wall by locating building frontages at the required setback or, where no setback requirement exists, at the front property line. Where additional setback is necessary or a prevailing setback exists, activate the area with a courtyard or "outdoor room" adjacent to the street by incorporating pedestrian amenities such as plazas with seating or water features, for example.

2 Provide direct paths of travel for pedestrian destinations within large developments. Especially near transit lines, create primary entrances for pedestrians that are safe, easily accessible, and a short distance from transit stops.

RECOMMENDED



✓ New ground floor storefront is built to the property line, defining the street edge



✓ Transit-oriented development with direct pedestrian path from subway entrance to street and shops

Site Planning *(cont.)*

3 Maintain existing alleys for access. Avoid vacating alleys or streets to address project-specific design challenges.

4 In dense neighborhoods, incorporate passageways or paseos into mid-block developments, particularly on through blocks, that facilitate pedestrian and bicycle access to commercial amenities from adjacent residential areas. Maintain easy access to commercial areas from adjacent residential neighborhoods to avoid unnecessary or circuitous travel.

RECOMMENDED



✓ Alleyway with active businesses and pedestrian access

NOT RECOMMENDED



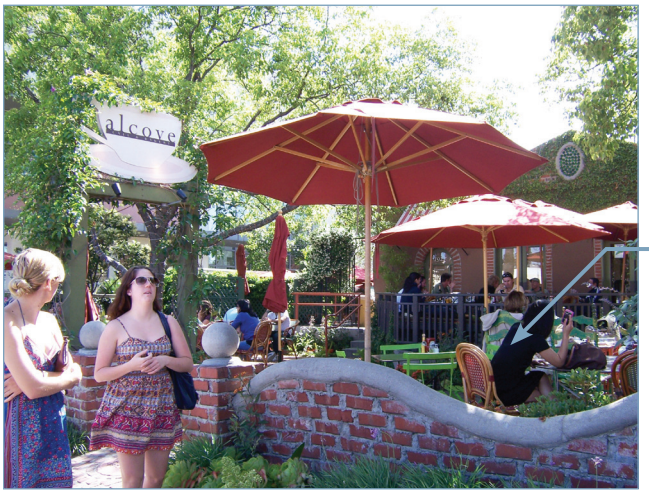
⚠ Vacated street severs pedestrian access to street network

5 Activate mid-block passageways, pedestrian walkways, or paseos using water features, pedestrian-level lighting, murals or artwork, benches, landscaping, or special paving so that they are safe and visually interesting spaces.

6 Place buildings around a central common open space to promote safety and the use of shared outdoor areas. In mid- and high-rise buildings, podiums between buildings and rooftop areas can be used as common areas.

7 Place public use areas such as restaurant seating, reception and waiting areas, lobbies, and retail, along street-facing walls where they are visible to passersby.

RECOMMENDED



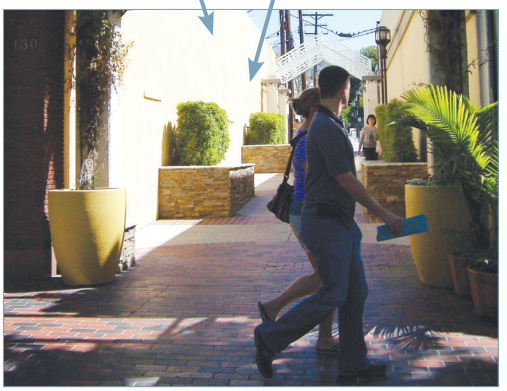
✓ Outdoor dining located along street frontage and visible to passersby

✓ Central common space or "outdoor room" to gather in a shared outdoor area



✓ Landscaping promotes a pleasant pedestrian experience

✓ Specially paved mid-block passage-way for easy access



Site Planning *(cont.)*

8 Place drive-thru elements away from primary site corners and adjacent primary streets.

9 At gas stations, car washes, and drive-thru establishments, ensure that separate structures on the site have consistent architectural detail and design elements to provide a cohesive project site.

RECOMMENDED



✓ Drive-thru is located to the side of the building, maintaining a strong street wall at the site corner

NOT RECOMMENDED



Drive-thru located at a corner creates a missed opportunity to draw pedestrians

10 Install bicycle racks and lockers, especially in multi-tenant commercial or mixed-use buildings located on Major or Secondary highways where bike routes are existing or planned. Ensure bicycle racks are placed in a safe, convenient, and well-lit location to encourage alternative modes of transport for employees and consumers with small purchases.

RECOMMENDED





✓ Bicycle racks located near public transit and commercial businesses

Building Orientation

11 Orient the long side of large-format retail establishments parallel to the public street to physically define the street edge. Large format retail with multiple tenants should provide distinct entrances and storefronts to improve site design flexibility for future retail uses at the same location.

RECOMMENDED



✓ Commercial building wraps around the street corner and engages pedestrians

NOT RECOMMENDED



⚠ Large retail development turns its back on public street

Entrances

1 Provide a logical sequence of entry and arrival as part of the site's design. Special entry treatments such as stamped or colored concrete and special planting and signage can be used to enhance entries and guide pedestrians.

2 Entries should be designed according to simple and harmonious proportions in relationship to the overall size and scale of the building. Ensure that pedestrian entries provide shelter year-round.

3 Ensure that the main entrance and entry approach can accommodate persons of all mobility levels.

RECOMMENDED

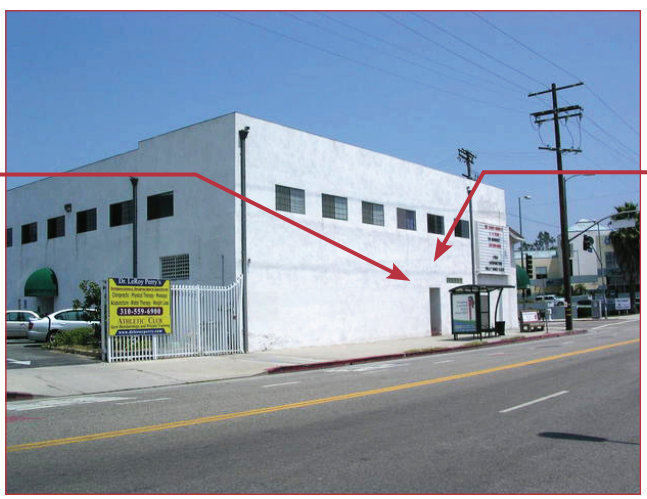
✓ Enhanced entryway with signage, lighting and special planting



✓ Prominent pedestrian-scaled entrance

NOT RECOMMENDED

⚠ Blank wall and lack of pedestrian shelter



⚠ Undefined entrance

Entrances *(cont.)*

4 Promote pedestrian activity by placing entrances at grade level and unobstructed from view from the public right-of-way. Avoid sunken entryways below street level. Where stairs are located near the main entrance, highly visible and attractive stairs should be placed in a common area such as an atrium or lobby and integrated with the predominant architectural design elements of the main building.

5 Ground floor retail establishments in mixed-use projects should maintain at least one street-facing entrance with doors unlocked during regular business hours to maintain an active street presence.

RECOMMENDED



✓ Attractive and inviting stairs draw pedestrians from the sidewalk

✓ Handicap accessible ramp

NOT RECOMMENDED



⚠ Sunken entry is uninviting



⚠ Entrance is obstructed by ramp and creates barrier from the sidewalk

6 Ensure that commercial ground floor uses provide clear and unobstructed windows, free of reflective coatings and exterior mounted gates and security grills. Ensure that landscaping does not create a barrier between pedestrians and the building frontage, nor views into buildings at the ground floor.

7 Install electronic security to avoid the need for unsightly security grills and bars. If such security measures are necessary, ensure that security grills and bars recess completely into pockets at the side or top of storefronts so as to conceal the grills when they are retracted.

RECOMMENDED



✓ Bicycle racks conveniently located near building entrance



✓ Using windows as a character defining feature

✓ Street-facing entrance on ground floor

NOT RECOMMENDED



⚠ Security grills are hostile towards passersby and obscure views



⚠ Missed opportunity to create an active street-facing entrance

Relationship to Adjacent Buildings

1 Ensure that new buildings are compatible in scale, massing, style, and/or architectural materials with existing structures in the surrounding neighborhood. In older neighborhoods, new developments should likewise respect the character of existing buildings with regards to height, scale, style, and architectural materials.

2 Soften transitions between commercial districts and immediately surrounding residential neighborhoods with respect to building height, massing, and negative impacts of light and noise. Plant trees, shrubs, or vines to grow between property lines.

3 Where commercial or multi-family projects are adjacent to single-family zones, provide a sensitive transition by maintaining a height compatible with adjacent residential buildings. Mitigate negative shade/shadow and privacy impacts by stepping back upper floors and avoiding direct views into neighboring single-family yards.

RECOMMENDED



✓ Tall hedge between single-family residential and commercial use serves as a privacy screen



✓ Alleyway provides additional transitional element between different land uses

NOT RECOMMENDED



⚠ High-rise office building adjacent to multi-family housing insensitive to height transition and creates negative shade/shadow impacts



⚠ Poor height transition between commercial and single-family residential properties

4 In pedestrian-oriented commercial areas with predominantly smaller storefronts (especially when a project is built over two or more lots), apply vertical breaks and pedestrian-scaled storefront bays to prevent monolithic "box-like" buildings and maintain a storefront rhythm consistent with surrounding buildings.

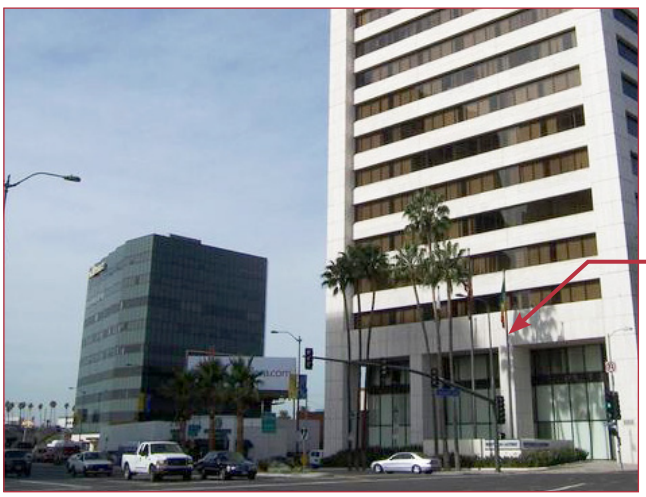
5 Break up the floor space in large retail developments to add variety, interest, and built-in flexibility to accommodate future uses of differing scales.

RECOMMENDED



✓ Ground floor commercial businesses are differentiated using vertical breaks and changes in building color and materials while maintaining an overall design theme

NOT RECOMMENDED



⚠ Ground floor bays should relate to pedestrians with respect to height, width, and overall proportions