

DOWNTOWN

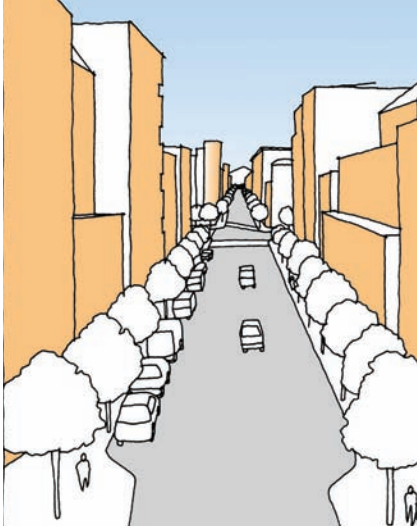
DESIGN GUIDE

CITY OF LOS ANGELES

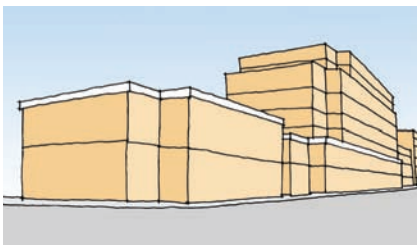


Chapter 6:

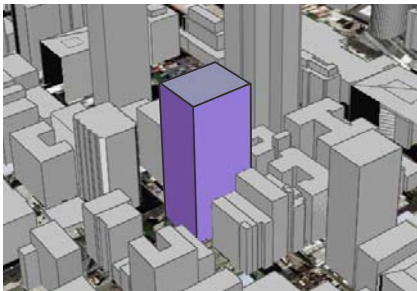
Massing and Street Wall



The street wall is largely defined by individual building massing.



Large half- to full-block projects should be massed to form a collection of appropriately scaled buildings that provide cohesion on a block.



All projects shall submit a 3-D model like the Downtown model shown above.

A. MASSING

The street is often described by urban designers as “a large outdoor room.” The ability to shape this room exists on every street, and its walls are defined by the primary façades of its buildings, which create a street wall. How building mass is distributed on a site usually has the greatest impact on a project’s overall appearance and on the strength of the street wall.

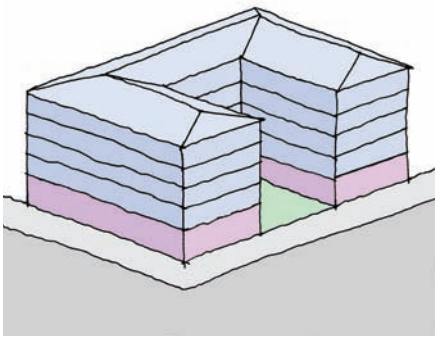
Breaking down large floor plates and varying a building’s height through the creation of smaller structures or façades is a valuable concept when designing large projects that consume half a block or more. Sculpting a building’s massing can also help avoid big bulky structures, which provide more visual monotony than variety. It is the well-balanced variety of building massing and textures of shadow, light and materials that in total adds to the richness of Downtown’s built environment.

Buildings generally fall within three types of massing as shown in Figure 6-1. Low-rise massing is generally less than 6-story structures. Mid-rise massing is 7 - 20 stories and typically 12-20 stories. High-rise pertains to towers that are more than 20 stories. Any portion of a building that is above 150’, the pre-1957 height limit Downtown, is subject to the tower standards and guidelines in this section.

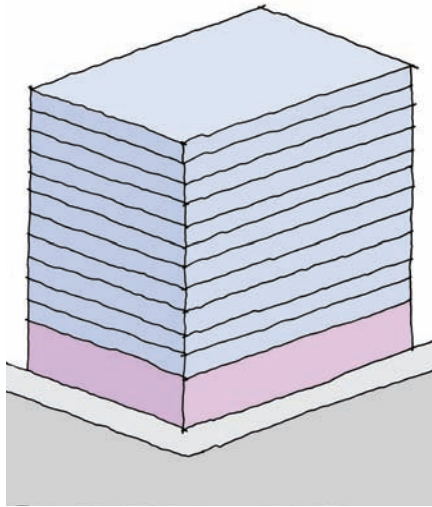
Design building massing to reinforce the street wall with well-scaled elements or structures that are sensitive to the neighborhood context.

1. Break large projects into a series of appropriately scaled buildings so that no building is more than 300 feet in length. Provide a passageway at least 20 feet wide between buildings.
2. Generally, buildings should maintain a consistent street wall along their street frontages. While variety in massing can occur through step-backs as a building ascends upward, it is not required.
3. Monolithic slab-like structures that wall off views and overshadow the surrounding neighborhood are discouraged.
4. To assist staff in understanding the proposed massing of a project, all projects shall provide a 3-D digital model in Google Earth SketchUp format.

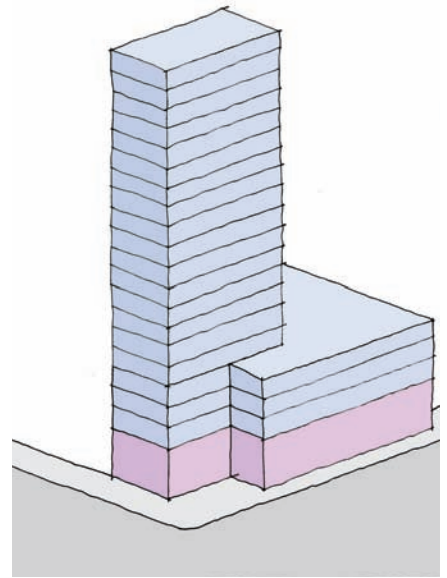
Figure 6-1 Examples of Three Massing Types.



Low-rise. Generally courtyard housing up to 6 stories.



Mid-rise. Block structures 7-20 stories and typically 12-20 stories.



High-rise. Generally towers that are more than 20 stories.



Street Wall. Examples showing various street wall heights.



3-story street wall



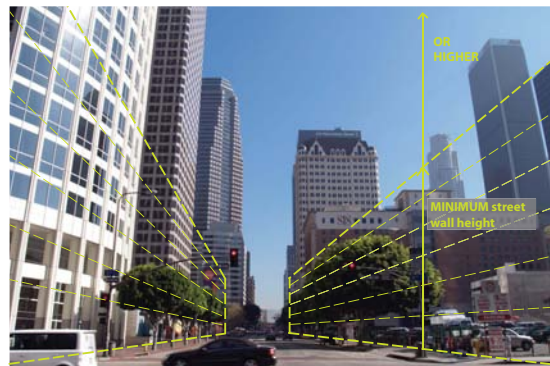
4-story street wall



6- and 7-story street wall



Bunker Hill. Minimum 3-story street wall.



Financial Core. Minimum 6-story street wall.

B. STREET WALL

On Retail Streets, design building walls along the sidewalk (Street Walls) to define the street and to provide a comfortable scale for pedestrians.

1. Street walls shall be located in relationship to the back of sidewalk as specified in Table 3-2.
2. 90% of a building's street walls shall have the minimum number of stories specified Table 6-2. Walls above the ground floor that step back less than 15 feet from the ground floor street wall are considered to be part of the street wall.
3. Buildings may, but are not required to, step back above the minimum height required along the street. Step backs should be judiciously applied to minimize disruption of the overall street wall.
4. Breaks in the street wall should be limited to those necessary to accommodate pedestrian pass-throughs, public plazas, entry forecourts, permitted vehicular access driveways, and hotel drop-offs.
5. An identifiable break should be provided between a building's retail floors (ground level and, in some cases, second and third floors) and upper floors. This break may consist of a change in material, change in fenestration, or similar means.

See Section 5 for the treatment of parking along street walls.

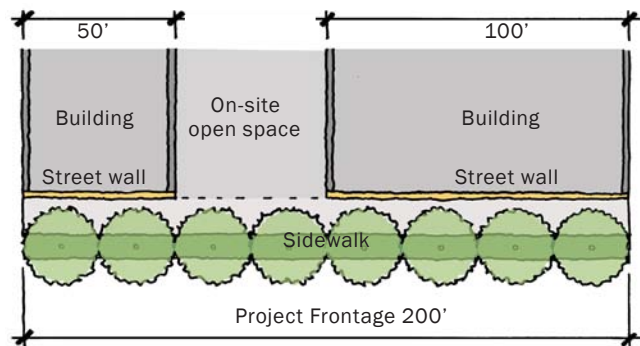
Table 6-1 Building Street Wall Characteristics

DISTRICT / NEIGHBORHOOD	MINIMUM PERCENT OF PROJECT FRONTAGE TO BE LINED WITH BUILDING STREET WALL AT BACK OF SETBACK ¹		MINIMUM STREET WALL HEIGHT (STORIES) ²
	RETAIL STREETS	OTHER STREETS	
Civic Center ³	NA	NA	NA
Civic Center South	80%	70%	75' (6)
Historic Downtown	95%	95%	75' (6) ⁴
Little Tokyo	90%	80%	35' (3)
Bunker Hill	75%	65%	35' (3)
Financial Core	80%	70%	75' (6)
South Park north of Pico Blvd.	80%	70%	45' (4)
South Park south of Pico Blvd.	80%	70%	35' (3)
City Markets	75%	65%	25' (2)

- 1 Setback from back of sidewalk is as specified in Table 3-1.
- 2 Stories are included for information only. The requirement is height measured in feet.
- 3 Minimum street wall is not applicable in the Civic Center due to the unique nature of city, state, county and federal projects.
- 4 The minimum street wall height along Broadway and Spring Street is 150'.

Note: Subject to approval of the Reviewing Agency, frontage along courtyards that are open on one side to the street and lined with ground-floor uses may be counted as street wall.

Example. Building street wall at back of setback=75% of project frontage:



Example of minimum percent of project frontage to be lined with building street wall at back of setback. In this example, 75% of the building street wall is at the back of setback.



South Park north. Minimum 4-story street wall.



City Markets. Minimum 2-story street wall.



Walls above the ground floor that step back less than 15' from the ground floor street wall are part of the street wall, as illustrated above.

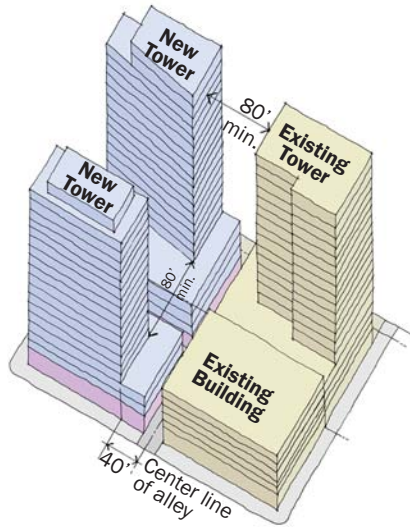
C. SPACING

Tower Spacing

Towers should be spaced to provide privacy, natural light and air, as well as to contribute to an attractive skyline.

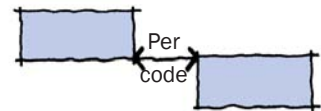
1. Generally, the portion of a tower above 150 feet shall be spaced at least 80 feet from all existing or possible future towers, both on the same block and across the street, except where 1) the towers are offset (staggered), 2) the largest windows in primary rooms are not facing one another, or 3) the towers are curved or angled, as illustrated in Figure 6-2.

Where there is an existing adjacent tower, the distance should be measured from the wall of the existing adjacent tower to the proposed tower. Where there is no existing adjacent tower, but one could be constructed in the future, the proposed tower must be 40 feet from an interior property line and 40 feet from the alley center line shared with the potential new tower as shown in Figure 6-2.

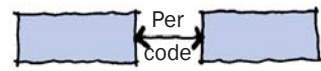


Exceptions. Towers over 150' in height may vary from the minimums shown in the plan diagram above in the following conditions:

1) Offset Towers



2) Adjacent Towers



if largest windows in primary room (as defined in Table 6-2) are not facing one another

3) Curved or Angled Towers

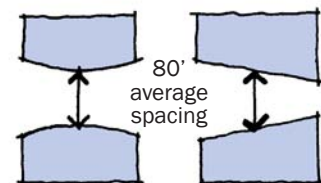


Figure 6-2 Plan and axonometric diagram showing minimum tower spacing to existing and future adjacent towers and exceptions.

Residential Unit Spacing

Provide privacy and natural light and air for all residential units.

- The shortest horizontal distance between the specified window of one residential unit and the specified window or wall of another residential unit in the same project shall have, at a minimum, the “line-of-sight” distances from the middle of the windows specified in Table 6-2 below.

Table 6-2 Minimum Line-of-Sight Distances Between Units

	PRIMARY ROOM - LARGEST WINDOW	SECONDARY ROOMS - LARGEST WINDOW	BLANK WALL
Primary room - Largest window	40'	-	-
Secondary rooms - Largest window	30'	15'	-
Blank Wall	20'	15'	10'
Public corridor	8'	0'	0'
Side property lines	20'	setback	setback

Primary room is a living, dining, combined living/dining or family room.

Secondary rooms are all rooms not defined as the primary room. If there is more than one large windows, any may be selected as the largest.

Blank walls include garden walls 4' or more in height, frosted glass or other translucent but nontransparent material, and windows with a lower sill not less than 5'-6" above finished floor.

Public Corridors are corridors used for circulation. They may be located within window-to-window or window-to-wall spacing distances. However, such corridors shall also have a minimum privacy spacing distance from primary and secondary windows as established above.

- In dwelling units, operable windows shall be installed in all units to provide natural ventilation.

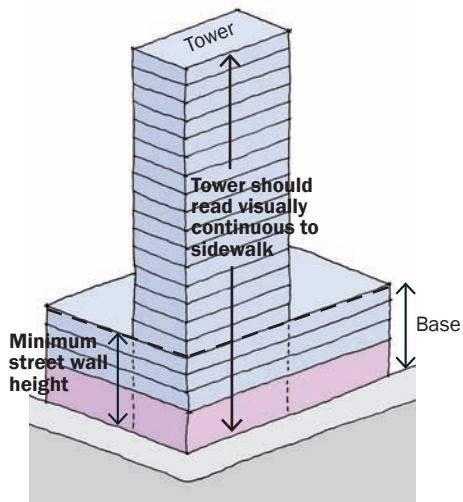


Lofts can feature natural light and views when designed with adequate floor-to-floor heights and extensive glazing on the exterior.

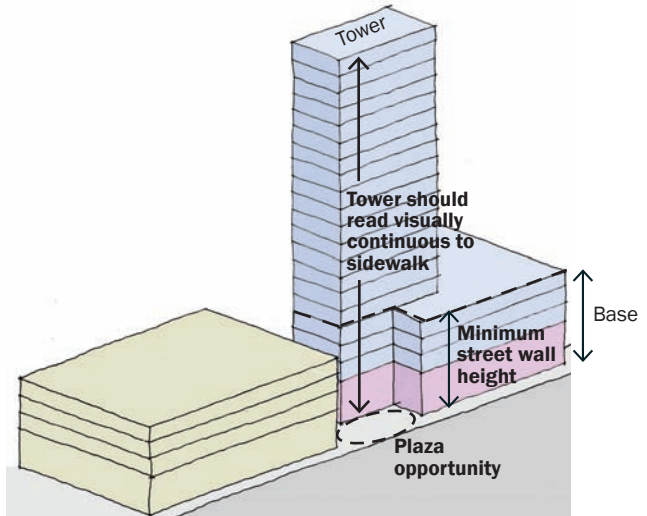
D. TOWERS

These diagrams illustrate several common types of tower forms and how the street wall minimum is measured for each. The base/tower consisting of ground floor retail and parking or habitable space above.

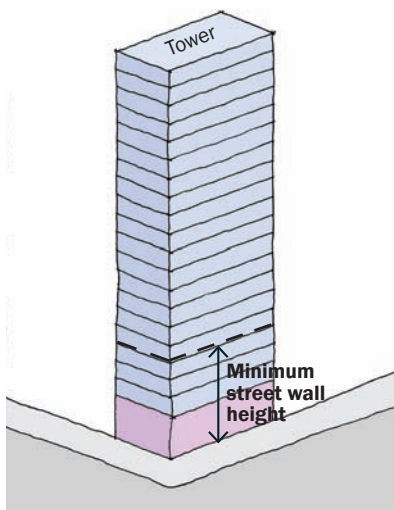
Figure 6-3 Common Tower Forms



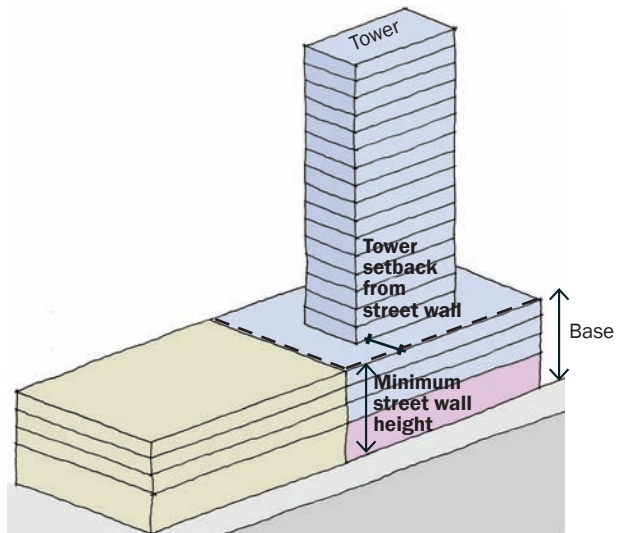
Tower at Street Corner. Base (or podium) with the tower set flush to a street corner. The tower massing and detail reads visually continuous to the sidewalk. The minimum street wall height must be met by the base and the tower.



Tower Engaged with Base. Base and tower forms are engaged. The tower massing and detail shall read visually continuous to the sidewalk. The minimum street wall height must be met by the base and the tower.



Tower Only. Tower form without a base. The minimum street wall must be met at the tower.



Tower Set onto a Base. Usually the tower rises above the base and steps back from the street wall 20' or more. The minimum street wall must be met by the base. This form is not generally preferred.

Tower Massing

Towers in Downtown greatly affect the appearance of the overall skyline. Evaluations in other cities suggest that towers are most attractive when they have a ratio of height to width of about 3.5:1, for example, 100 feet wide and 350 feet tall. Reducing the bulk of the top of a tower (“sculpting” the tower) can make it more attractive.

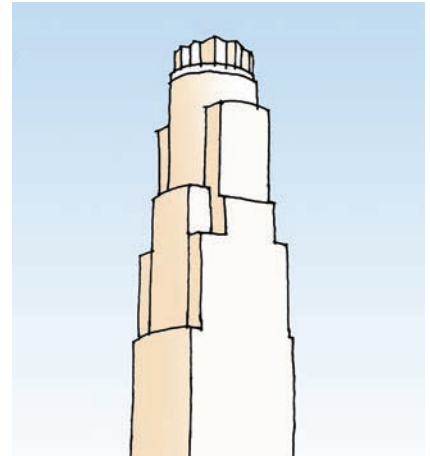
Towers should have slender massing and sound proportions.

1. Towers should have their massing designed to reduce overall bulk and to appear slender.
2. Towers may extend directly up from the property line at the street and are not required to be setback.
3. Tower siting and massing should maintain key views to important natural and man-made features.

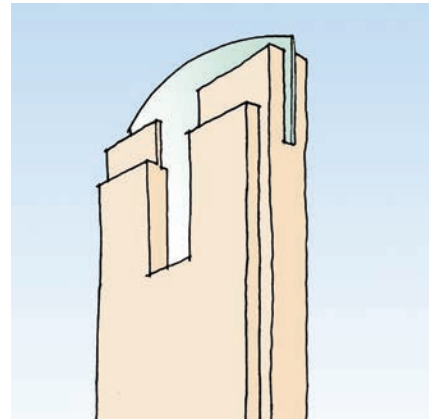
Tower Form

Tower forms should appear simple yet elegant, and add an endearing sculptural form to the skyline.

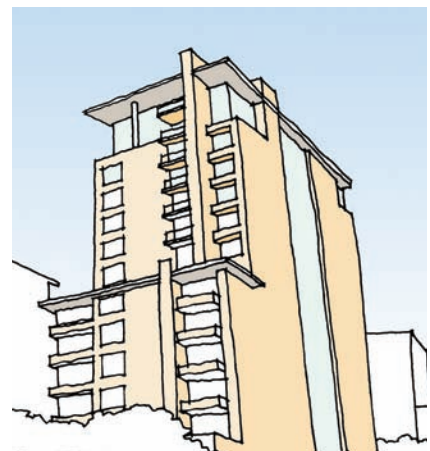
4. Towers should be designed to achieve a simple faceted geometry (employing varied floor plans), and exhibit big, simple moves. They should not appear overwrought or to have over-manipulated elements.
5. Towers that emulate a more streamline modern style (such as a Mies van der Rohe tower employing a single floor plan) should provide variety through subtle details in the curtain wall, and the articulation of a human-scaled base at the street level.
6. If a project has more than one tower, they should be complementary to each other and employ the same architectural design approach.
7. Generally, buildings over 150' tall (the historic datum for Downtown) should not be historicized. They are contemporary interventions in the skyline and should appear as such.
8. A tower's primary building entrances should be designed at a scale appropriate to the overall size and design of the tower and be clearly marked.
9. A building's top should be delineated with a change of detail and meet the sky with a thinner form, or tapered overhang.



Tapered. Tower tapers gracefully towards the sky to appear thinnest at top.



Engaged. Tower as a set of engaged masses that form a sculptural top.



Pavilion. Tower retains its box form towards the sky and culminates in a pavilion-like top.