

# **DOWNTOWN**

## **DESIGN GUIDE**

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### **CITY OF LOS ANGELES**



# **Chapter 3:**

# **Sidewalks and Setbacks**





Example of building overhang that does not interfere with street tree growth.

Example showing the parkway along the curb, the clear path of travel and use of the remaining sidewalk for outdoor dining.



OUTDOOR DINING, ETC.

PATH OF TRAVEL

PARKWAY

### A. SIDEWALKS

The Downtown Street Standards establish required sidewalk widths for all Downtown streets. On many streets, the required sidewalk width is a combination of public right-of-way (dedication) and easement for sidewalk purposes.

On segments of most north-south streets, an average easement for sidewalk purposes is required. The average easement provides flexibility in building design and at the same time provides space for sidewalk activity. A required average easement may range from 0' to 3 times the average, provided that the total area of the easement divided by the length of the property frontage equals the required average.

*Design sidewalks that are walkable and accommodate a variety of uses.*

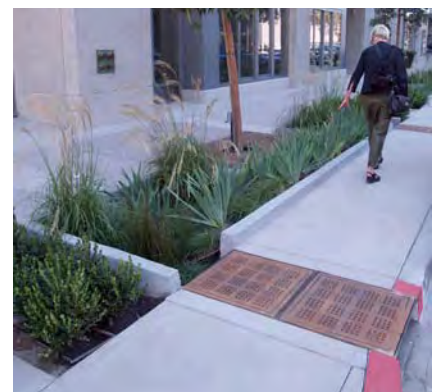
1. A building may project over the required sidewalk easement above a height of 40' and below a depth of 5' to accommodate street trees. Projections, which are permitted in the public ROW by the Municipal Code, such as signs, canopies and awnings, are permitted over the required easement, subject to the same approvals.
2. Provide a minimum 6' continuous path of travel.
3. Provide an 18-24" wide access zone next to the curb, which includes the 6" curb and 12" wide granite or brick edge band adjacent to the back of curb.
4. Outdoor dining may occur on any portion of the paved sidewalk provided a minimum 6' wide continuous path of travel is maintained.

Design sidewalks to accommodate and support large street trees and to collect stormwater, providing continuous parkways where feasible.

5. Provide continuous landscaped parkways, except in the Historic Downtown, adjacent to bus stops, and in other locations determined by staff to be inappropriate for parkways. The continuous landscaped parkways should be designed to collect and retain or treat runoff from, at a minimum, the sidewalk and, if approved by the Bureau of Engineering, adjacent on-site, ground level open space during a storm event producing 3/4 inch of rainfall in a 24-hour period.
6. Where there is curbside parking, one walkway for every one or two parking spaces or other means of access shall be provided through the parkway to curbside parking.
7. If a parkway is designed to collect stormwater from the sidewalk only, the parkway shall be directly behind the access zone and a minimum of 7' wide where the required sidewalk width is 15' or more; 6' wide where the required sidewalk width is more than 10' but less than 15'; and 4' wide where the required sidewalk width is 10'.
8. The elevation of the parkways within 2' of the sidewalk pavement shall be within a few inches of the sidewalk elevation. The center 2' or 3' of the parkway should be depressed 3-4" to form a shallow swale to collect sidewalk stormwater or alternative means of storing runoff, such as gravel sumps within the parkway, may be provided.
9. The roots of trees planted in the parkway shall not be restricted by concrete curbs, root barriers or other means, so that roots may extend throughout the parkway and support a large, healthy tree canopy.
10. If parkways are designed to collect stormwater from the street as well as from the sidewalk, they shall be designed according to the Bureau of Engineering Green Streets guidelines or standards. However, if trees are required to be planted in separate tree wells, rather than in the parkways, as in the bottom right image, they shall be planted as described in the provisions for tree wells on the next page.



All continuous landscaped parkways collect stormwater runoff from the sidewalk.



In addition, they can be designed to filter stormwater run-off from street. If there is a raised curb around the parkway as in this example, the access strip next to the curb must be wider than 18".





Tree with large tree well surrounded by permeable paving with gap graded soil to store and infiltrate stormwater beneath.



Where average 24' wide sidewalks are required, as on Grand Avenue in South Park, a double row of trees is also required.



Where narrow sidewalks or basements prohibit in-ground trees, planters may be used.

Where it is not feasible to plant street trees in continuous landscaped parkways, provide large street wells with gap-graded soil beneath the sidewalk.

11. If trees are not planted in continuous landscaped parkways with the opportunity for unrestricted root growth, they shall be planted in large trees wells that are at least 10' long and a minimum of 7' wide where the required sidewalk width is 15' or more; 6' wide where the required sidewalk width is more than 10' but less than 15'; and 4' wide where the required sidewalk width is 10'.
12. If tree wells have less than 100 square feet of surface area, gap-graded soil shall be provided under the entire sidewalk as specified in Section 9 and Appendix B.
13. Where average 24' wide sidewalks are required by the Downtown Street Standards (through a combination of dedication and easement), at least 50% of a project's frontage shall have sidewalks at least 22' wide and a second row of street trees aligned with those in the parkway zone shall be provided. The interior row of trees should generally be in large tree wells.
14. Where tree wells and parkways would conflict with existing basements, underground vaults, historic paving materials, or other existing features that cannot be easily relocated, the tree well and parkway design shall be modified to eliminate such conflicts. Parking meters and signs are examples of existing features that can be easily relocated. Digital copies of maps showing existing basements in the public ROW are available from BOE, CRA or City Planning Urban Design Studio.
15. Where existing sidewalks are narrow, as on east-west streets in the Historic Downtown, the reviewing agency may determine that street trees not be provided.

Install and maintain streetscape improvements on all streets adjacent to a project.

16. Install streetscape improvements as specified in Section 9.
17. All sidewalk improvements shall be installed and maintained by the adjacent property owners. For example, parkways and tree wells shall be planted, irrigated and maintained by the adjacent property owners as described in Section 9.

## B. SETBACKS

Provide setbacks appropriate to the adjacent land use and district.

1. On Retail Streets, as defined in Figure 3-1, and adjacent to ground floor space designed for retail use in other locations, the building street wall (as defined in Table 6-1) shall be located at or within a few feet of the back of the required average sidewalk width.
2. Adjacent to ground floor space designed for other uses, buildings shall be set back from the back of the required sidewalk to provide a buffer between the sidewalk and building as specified in Table 3-1.
3. Variations in the setback are encouraged to respond to building function and to create visual interest.
4. Treatment of the setback required in Table 3-1 will vary with the use for which the ground-floor is designed:
5. Adjacent to retail, the setback, if any, shall be primarily hardscape and may be used for outdoor dining and other commercial activities.
6. Adjacent to live-work space, the average two-foot setback, shall include a little landscaping, which may be in pots or raised planters.
  - Adjacent to ground-floor residential units with individual entries on the street, the minimum average 5-foot or 6-foot setback shall be primarily landscaped and may include walkways, porches, raised planters, other solid walls up to 3 feet above sidewalk elevation, and transparent fences (e.g., wrought iron, tubular steel, glass) up to a height of 5 feet above sidewalk elevation.
  - If the Reviewing Agency determines that the active ground floor treatment required in Section 4 is not feasible, a minimum average 5-foot setback which is densely landscaped shall be provided.



Zero setback with ground-floor retail.



A small setback with a little landscaping next to professional office or live-work space.

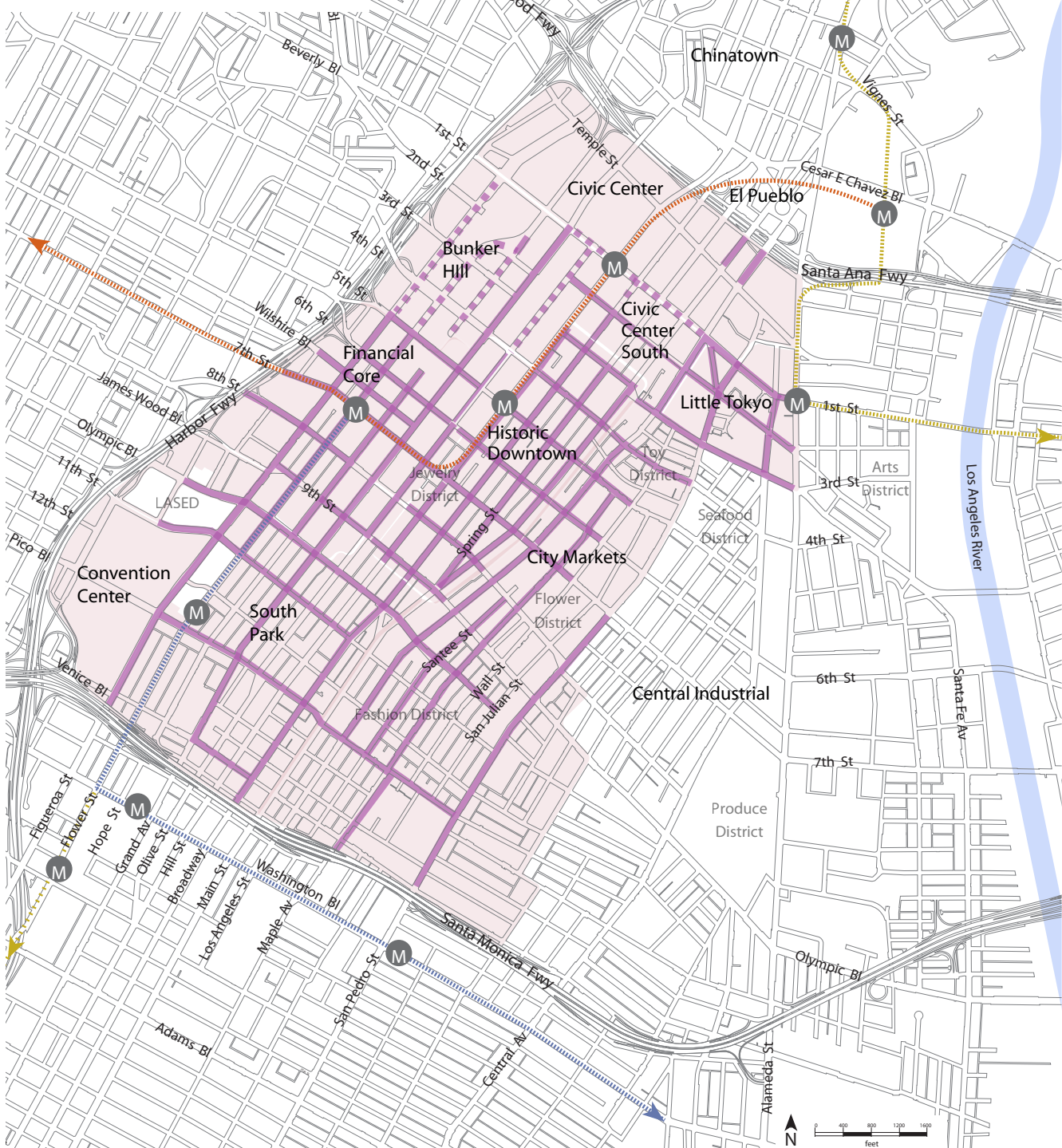


Housing with front yards and secondary entrances along the sidewalk.



### Figure 3-1 Retail Streets

Percent of Project's street frontage, excluding access to parking, along which ground floor space must be designed to accommodate retail, professional office, or live work uses:



**Table 3-1** Permitted Street Wall Setbacks From Back of Required Sidewalk <sup>1</sup>  
(Minimum Average/Minimum-Maximum Range)

| DISTRICT /<br>NEIGHBORHOOD     | ADJACENT GROUND FLOOR USE |   |  |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|---|--|
|                                | RETAIL <sup>2</sup>       | PROFESSIONAL OFFICE /<br>LIVE WORK <sup>3</sup> | RESIDENTIAL WITH<br>INDIVIDUAL ENTRIES<br>ON STREET <sup>4</sup> |
| Civic Center                   | 0'/0-10'                  | 5'/0-15'  | 5'/5-20'   |
| Civic Center South             | 0'/0-5'                   | 3'/0-10'  | 5'/3-15'   |
| Historic Downtown <sup>5</sup> | 0'                        | 0'  | 0'   |
| Little Tokyo                   | 0'/0-3'                   | 2'/0-5'   | 5'/3-15'   |
| Bunker Hill                    | 0'/0-5'                   | 3'/0-15'  | 6'/4-16'   |
| Financial Core                 | 0'/0-3'                   | 2'/0-5'   | 6'/4-12'   |
| South Park                     | 0'/0-5'                   | 2'/0-5'   | 6'/4-12'   |
| City Markets                   | 0'/0-3'                   | 2'/0-10'  | 5'/4-16'   |

- 1 Required sidewalk is as defined by the Downtown Street Standards. In some cases, the required sidewalk width is a combination of public right-of-way (dedication) and a sidewalk easement.
- 2 No setback is required adjacent to ground-floor retail; however, a project may set back within the specified range.
- 3 Setback should include some landscaping, which may be in pots or planters.
- 4 Setback should include at least 50% landscaping.
- 5 Match the prevailing setback where appropriate.

Notes: If at least 50% of the building frontage along a block face is occupied by one or more designated Historic Resources, the average setback of any new building shall match the average setback of the Historic Resources.

The ground floor street wall (primarily entries and display windows) may set back farther than the specified range, provided that structural columns and building walls above the ground floor are located within the specified range, as illustrated below.



The Bradbury Building's columns and upper story walls are within a foot of the back of the required sidewalk, while entrances and display windows are set back a few feet.



Similarly, columns are at the property line, while the façade is set back a few feet.



Where the ground floor is designed for live-work or office space, a small average setback with landscaping is appropriate.



**Figure 3-2** Sidewalk treatment varies with ground floor treatment.

