

DOWNTOWN

DESIGN GUIDE

CITY OF LOS ANGELES



Chapter 7:

On-Site and Open Space



Biddy Mason Park is a paseo connecting Broadway and Spring Street.



On-site open space should be designed to serve a building's residents.



Projects that provide publicly accessible open space at-grade may receive a reduction in the on-site open space requirement .

Provide publicly accessible open spaces at street level that provide pedestrian linkages throughout Downtown.

1. A 50% reduction in required open space will be granted if a project includes open space that is:
 - Located at the ground level;
 - Open to the public during daylight hours;
 - At least 5,000 square feet in size;
 - Lined with ground floor spaces designed for retail, especially restaurants that include outdoor dining, and/or cultural uses, along at least 20% of its frontage;
 - At least 40% landscaped, including usable lawn or lawn alternative; and includes at least one gathering place with fountain or other focal element.
2. Where blocks are longer than 400 feet (the north-south dimension of most Downtown blocks exceed 400 feet), one mid-block pedestrian pathway or paseo, which is open to the public, should be provided by a project that includes more than 300 feet of frontage or is located in the middle of the block.
3. A paseo shall:
 - Be at least 15' wide at a minimum and 20' wide average;
 - Have a clear line of sight to the back of the paseo, gathering place, or focal element;
 - Be at least 50% open to the sky or covered with a transparent material;
 - Be lined with ground floor spaces designed for retail, especially restaurants, and/or cultural uses along at least 50% of its frontage; and
 - Include at least one gathering place with a fountain or other focal element.

Provide adequate open space to serve residents.

4. Site landscaping and residential open space shall be provided as required by Section 12.21.G. of the Zoning Code, except as follows:
5. At least 50% of the required trees shall be canopy trees that shade open spaces, sidewalks and buildings.
6. Variances from the required number of trees shall not be permitted; however, required trees may be planted off-site if the Reviewing Agency determines that they cannot be accommodated on-site. Off-site trees may be planted, in the following locations in order of preference: nearby streets, public parks and private projects

Establish a clear hierarchy of common open spaces distinguished by design and function to create an connected pedestrian realm conducive to both active and passive uses.

Downtown's common open spaces are comprised of the following:

- **Streets.** Streets are the most public of all open spaces. Streets communicate the quality of the public environment and the care a city has for its residents.
 - **Residential Setbacks.** Building setbacks adjacent to residential buildings provide a transition between the public and private realm, allowing residents to have private spaces with visual access to the public realm.
 - **Paseos.** Paseos are extensions of the street grid located on private property. As outdoor passages devoted exclusively to pedestrians, they establish clear connections among streets, plazas and courtyards, building entrances, parking and transit facilities.
 - **Entry forecourts.** Entry forecourts announce the function and importance of primary building entrances. They should provide a clear, comfortable transition between exterior and interior space.
 - **Courtyards.** Courtyards are common open space areas of a scale and enclosure that is conducive to social interaction at a smaller scale.
 - **Plazas.** Plazas are common open space areas typically amenable to larger public gatherings. They are readily accessible from the street, as well as active building uses.
 - **Corner Plazas.** Corner plazas should be an appropriate in scale (intimate for residential, larger for commercial) and be programmed with specific uses (to provide outdoor dining for an adjacent restaurant, or small neighborhood gathering place featuring a public amenity). Unprogrammed or over-scaled corner plazas are discouraged.
 - **Roof Terraces.** Roof terraces and gardens can augment open space and are especially encouraged in conjunction with hotels or residential uses.
7. Locate on-site open space types in relation to the street and permit public access during normal business hours as follows:



Good example of a commercial corner plaza.



Good example of a roof terrace.

Table 7-1 Open Space-to-Street Relationship and Public Access Requirement

OPEN SPACE TYPE	LOCATION	CONNECTION TO STREET	PUBLIC ACCESS
Residential Setbacks	street level	private with visual access	not required
Paseos	street level *	direct connection required	required
Entry Forecourts	street level *	direct connection required	required
Courtyards	street level or above grade	direct connection not required	not required
Plazas	street level *	direct connection required	required
Roof Terraces	above grade or rooftop	direct connection not required	not required

* minor deviations of up to 2 vertical feet from sidewalk level are permitted



Seating is an essential element in most open spaces.

Incorporate amenities that facilitate outdoor activities such as standing, sitting, strolling, conversing, window-shopping and dining, including seating for comfort and landscaping for shade and aesthetics.

8. Provide landscaping and seating in each open space type as follows. Planters, planter boxes and similar planting containers may count toward this requirement.

Table 7-2 Landscaping and Seating

OPEN SPACE TYPE	MINIMUM PLANTED AREA	MINIMUM SEATING*
Paseos	10%	1 seat per 2,000 SF
Courtyards	25%	1 seat per 500 SF
Plazas	25%	1 seat per 500 SF
Roof Terraces	25%	None specified

* seats may be permanent or movable, accessible during normal business hours. Two linear feet of bench or seat wall equals one seat

9. Plazas and courtyards are encouraged to incorporate amenities beyond the minimum required, including permanent and/or temporary seating, to facilitate their enjoyment and use. Seating should be placed with consideration to noontime sun and shade; deciduous trees should be planted as the most effective means of providing comfortable access to sun and shade.

Use landscape elements to provide shade and other functional and aesthetic objectives.

10. On roof terraces, incorporate trees and other plantings in permanent and temporary planters that will shade, reduce reflective glare, and add interest to the space. In addition, provide permanent and temporary seating that is placed with consideration to sun and shade, and other factors contributing to human comfort.
11. Landscape elements should support an easy transition between indoors and outdoors through such means as well-sited and comfortable steps, shading devices and/or planters that mark building entrances, etc.
12. Landscape elements should establish scale and reinforce continuity between indoors and outdoors space. Mature canopy trees shall be provided within open spaces, especially along streets and required setbacks.

13. Landscape elements should provide scale, texture and color. A rich, coordinated palette of landscape elements that enhances the Development Site's identity is encouraged.
14. Landscaping should be used to screen or break up the mass of blank walls. For example, trees and shrubs may be planted in front of a blank wall where there is room or vines may be trained on the wall where space is limited.

Design open space areas so as to lend them the character of outdoor rooms contained by buildings.

15. Contain open space along a minimum percentage of its perimeter by building and/or architectural features as follows:

Table 7-3 Containment of Open Space

OPEN SPACE TYPE	MINIMUM CONTAINMENT
Paseos	2 sides
Entry Forecourts	2 sides
Courtyards	3 sides
Plazas	1 side
Roof Terraces	none



Landscaping can take a variety of forms.



Open space and streets should be designed to accommodate a variety of activities and events.