DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR:
Multi-Unit Residential, Commercial and Industrial

JULY 2012
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CITY OF VICTORIA

PREAMBLE

The purpose of these guidelines is to assist in achievement of placemaking related to multi-unit residential development (three or more units), commercial and industrial uses. Collectively, the guidelines are intended to guide applicants in achieving new development and additions to existing buildings that result in design excellence, livability, contribution to sense of place and urbanism that is responsive to Victoria's context, while enabling flexibility and fostering creativity.

All visuals in this document are provided for illustrative purposes only to support description of the guidelines.

1.0 Area-wide context and transition between areas

General guidelines

1.1 New development should be compatible with and improve the character of established areas through design that is unifying, sensitive and innovative:

1.1.1 The architectural approach should provide unity and coherence in relation to existing place character and patterns of development through the use of appropriate forms, massing, building articulation, features, and materials.

1.1.2 Buildings should be designed with sensitivity to context, and build upon, without replication or mimicry, the character that is Victoria, creating a benchmark for future development.

1.1.3 Building design that is sensitive and innovative in response to context is encouraged.

1.2 Where new development is directly abutting lands in a different OCP Urban Place Designation, or it directly abuts a different Development Permit Area, the design should provide a transition between areas in ways that respond to established form and character, and that anticipate any future development.

1.3 New buildings should respect the skyline prominence of heritage and other landmarks as identified in the official community plan and local area plans.

1.4 Trees and natural vegetation that line streets should be protected when possible.

Additional guidelines

*The following guidelines are specific to **multi-unit residential** and residential mixed-use development and building additions:*

1.5 New residential and residential mixed-use development should respect the character of established areas and building variety through the form and massing of housing.

1.6 Multi-unit residential development that directly abuts any residential building that is lower and smaller in scale, including, but not limited to, single-family dwellings, should:

1.6.1 Provide a transition in its form and massing to lower-density building forms.

1.6.2 Be designed to address privacy, particularly for portions of the development abutting the side yards of adjacent single-family dwellings.

2.0 Streetscape, relationship to the street and orientation

General guidelines

2.1 New development should contribute to cohesion, visual identity and the quality of streetscapes, particularly when adjacent and nearby buildings are similar in scale, proportion, rhythm, and pattern:

- 2.1.1 New development should incorporate building elements that are complementary, such as street walls, façade rhythm, and horizontal cornice lines.
- 2.1.2 New development is encouraged to add interest to the streetscape through variations in building height, rooflines and massing.
- 2.1.3 New development that is located on a corner site should be designed to contribute to both streetscapes.

2.2 New development should avoid long unvaried stretches of frontages in ways that include, but are not limited to:

- 2.2.1 Massing that gives the impression of small blocks.
- 2.2.2 Little or no repetition in the proportion of frontages, where feasible.

2.3 New development is encouraged to have a strong relationship to the street, particularly when public uses are allowed along street level.

- 2.3.1 Buildings should be oriented towards public streets, walkways and amenities (parks, harbour and coastline, etc).
- 2.3.2 Buildings should be located to provide an effective street edge while respecting the established, desired streetscape rhythm.
- 2.3.3 Where possible, buildings should frame public streets and open spaces to create a sense of enclosure, street vitality, and safety.
- 2.3.4 Building facades should be modulated at grade level to enable street activity such as browsing, outdoor cafes and street entertainment, as well as to enable placement of seating, where appropriate.
- 2.3.5 Visual and physical connections between the public street and buildings should be developed (e.g. patios and spill-out activity, views to and from interior spaces, awnings and canopies).

Additional guidelines

*The following guidelines are specific to **multi-unit residential** and residential mixed-use development and building additions:*

2.4 Residential use at street level should have strong entry features and building designs that encourage interaction with the street.

2.5.1 Individual entrances with direct connections to the public sidewalk are encouraged.

2.5 Multi-unit residential developments are encouraged to be oriented to allow exposure to natural light.

2.6 Buildings should be located to address privacy impacts of adjacent residential uses and private open spaces.

*The following guidelines are specific to **commercial** and commercial mixed-use development and building additions:*

2.7 Primary entrances on commercial buildings should have direct access from a public sidewalk or from pedestrian routes within sites.

2.8.1 In mixed-use buildings, residential and commercial entries should be differentiated.

2.8 Commercial and mixed-use buildings should be located to the edge of the sidewalk and sited continuously and without breaks.

2.9 Ground floor retail and other commercial uses should maximize the amount of glazing and windows to increase the interactions between pedestrians and interior spaces.

*The following guidelines are specific to **industrial** and industrial mixed use development and building additions:*

2.10 Industrial or industrial mixed-use buildings with frontages visual to the street are encouraged to include offices or showrooms at street level, and decorative design elements.

3.0 Human scale, massing, height and architectural features

General guidelines

3.1 Larger and longer buildings should be visually broken into human-scaled proportions. This could be achieved in a number of ways, including breaks in form, projections, balconies, bay windows, surface treatments, and building articulation.

3.1.1 Building bases should be well-designed and articulated, especially along facades that are adjacent to a street.

3.1.2 Large, blank windowless and featureless walls that are visible from the public realm are strongly discouraged.

3.1.3 Building facades should be designed so that entrances for pedestrians are legible and prominent, and that vehicular entrances and doors are subordinate features.

3.2 Building facades along streets should include architectural features that provide pedestrian interest. The location and design of service ('back-of-house') functions should therefore be carefully considered, including, but are not limited to:

1.1.1 Parking, vehicular entrances and garage doors.

1.1.2 Fire exits.

1.1.3 Refuse and recycling receptacles.

1.1.4 Utility (electricity, gas etc) cabinets.

3.3 Perceived building mass should be mitigated through the use of architectural elements, visually interesting rooflines, stepping back of upper floors, detailing that creates rhythm and visual interest, or other design solutions.

3.3.1 Massing should avoid shadowing of open spaces that are publicly accessible.

3.3.2 Roof forms should complement the character of buildings in the immediate context.

3.3.3 The visual impact and perceived massing of any enclosed elevator shafts and other mechanical equipment should be reduced with architectural treatments.

3.4 Distinctive massing, building articulation and architectural treatments should be incorporated for corner sites, highly visible building sites or buildings, or portions of buildings, when these terminate street corridors.

3.5 For areas where mid-rise and high-rise buildings are permitted, upper levels should be stepped back to enable sunlight penetration to the street and public open space, mitigate the perception of building mass and minimize the impact of winds.

Additional guidelines

*The following guidelines are specific to **multi-unit residential** and residential mixed-use development and building additions:*

3.6 Porches, steps, alcoves or other design features are encouraged to make transitions from the public realm of the street and sidewalk, to the private realm of residences.

3.7 The use of building elements such as raised terraces, forecourts or landscaping should be considered to enhance residential entrances.

3.8 Mid-rise and high-rise multi-unit residential buildings are encouraged to be stepped in order to provide opportunities for balconies and rooftop terraces that take advantage of sunlight and views.

*The following guidelines are specific to **commercial** and commercial mixed-use development and building additions:*

3.9 Where residential and commercial entrances occur on the same building, proper separation of the entry and clarity of their identities is encouraged.

3.10 Overhangs and canopies are encouraged, especially on commercial buildings, and should be designed to integrate with architectural features of buildings.

4.0 Exterior finishes

General guidelines

4.1 Exterior building materials should be high quality, durable and capable of weathering gracefully.

4.1.1 Higher quality materials used on the principal façade should be continued around any building corner or edge which is visible from the public realm.

4.2 Rich and varied architectural materials are encouraged to enhance and articulate street frontages.

4.3 Exposed party walls and blank side elevations, where necessary, should incorporate features such as texture, reveals, colours, plantings or other treatments to provide visual interest.

Additional guidelines

*The following guidelines are specific to **multi-unit residential** and residential mixed-use development and building additions:*

4.4 The exposed undersides of balconies and porches that are visible from a street or public walkway should be clad with exterior materials that result in a finished appearance and which complement the palette of exterior materials used on the rest of the building.

*The following guidelines are specific to **commercial** and commercial mixed-use development and building additions:*

4.5 For buildings with commercial use at ground level, mirrored, coloured or dark tinted glass are strongly discouraged as glazing materials at street level to maintain transparency.

5.0 Open spaces and landscaping

General guidelines

5.1 Open space should be usable, attractive and well-integrated with the design of the building.

5.2 Public and semi-public spaces should be distinguished from private spaces through design elements, including, but not limited to:

- 5.2.1 Building and site design.
- 5.2.2 Changes in paving or grading.
- 5.2.3 Architectural features.
- 5.2.4 Changes in landscape, raised planters or other landscaping features.

5.3 Consideration should be given to landscaped open space, accessible from the adjacent right-of-way, to soften the impact of larger and longer buildings. Possible locations include the corners of lots, at building entrances and walkway entrances.

5.4 The scale and location of planting material should complement and be consistent with the scale and massing of buildings.

5.5 Landscape design should preserve existing native vegetation where possible.

5.6 Species selection should provide interest year-round. The inclusion of deciduous tree species in landscape plantings should be considered to permit light penetration in winter.

5.7 Landscape should be designed to allow clear, unobstructed views of surrounding areas through the placement of living features and other elements.

5.8 A minimum of 30% of the required common landscaped areas should include a diverse combination of plants and vegetation that are native to southern Vancouver Island, food-bearing (capable of being harvested for food and medicine) or that provide pollinator habitats.

5.9 The design of landscaped areas should avoid the location of plants and trees immediately adjacent to air intakes on mechanical equipment and should also consider potential impacts from plant-based allergens within common outdoor gathering spaces.

Additional guidelines

*The following guidelines are specific to **multi-unit residential** and residential mixed-use development and building additions:*

5.10 Consideration should be given to the inclusion of private open space in residential developments in the form of courtyards, recessed balconies, terraced balconies or rooftop gardens.

*The following guidelines are specific to **commercial, industrial** and associated mixed-use development and building additions:*

5.11 Commercial and industrial buildings may include atria as open space.

6.0 Lighting

General guidelines

6.1 Consideration should be given to lighting as a key element of design for the effect on building façades, adjacent or nearby buildings, and any open spaces.

6.1.1 Light fixtures should avoid overspill.

6.1.2 Colour shift is strongly discouraged.

6.1.3 Low energy options that emit soft light are strongly encouraged.

6.2 Human-scaled lighting is encouraged (e.g. light standards of appropriate height for pedestrians) for night time visibility, comfort and security.

6.3 Light fixtures should be high quality, and are encouraged to be affordable to maintain.

7.0 Universal accessible design and safety

General guidelines

7.1 A high standard of accessibility in site, building and landscape design is encouraged to address the needs of all users, including people who have disabilities.

7.1.1 Disabled access should be appropriately designed and clearly visible from the main entrance, not relegated to a secondary building frontage for the sake of architectural convenience.

7.1.2 When provided, access ramps and related elements should be visually integrated with the overall building design and site plan so as to not appear disjointed from the building façade.

7.1.3 Smooth routes should be provided. Vertical disruptions along pedestrian routes should be avoided for ease of use by people with wheeled mobility devices, strollers, and bicycles.

7.1.4 Landscaping should be accessible for people with varying levels of ability and mobility.

7.2 The following factors should be taken into account to design environments that people feel safe to use:

7.2.1 Visibility by others (design for seeing and being seen).

7.2.2 Entrapment spots (avoid small areas shielded on three sides).

7.2.3 Lighting (others' faces should be visible and blinding glare avoided).

7.2.4 Sightlines (ability to see the route ahead and open spaces from buildings).

7.2.5 Activity generators (design places for uses that attract people and that provide opportunities for casual surveillance).

7.3 New development should be designed to maximize opportunities for casual surveillance and "eyes on the street" through placement of windows, balconies and street-level uses.

7.3.1 Blank, windowless walls should be avoided, which do not permit occupants to observe the street in the course of everyday activities.

7.3.2 Window features with transparent glazing should be placed to overlook streets, pathways, open spaces and parking areas to increase neighbourhood security.

7.4 Crime Prevention through Environmental Design practices should be incorporated as they relate to architecture, site and landscape design.

Additional guidelines

*The following guidelines are specific to **multi-unit residential** and residential mixed-use development and building additions:*

7.5 Multi-unit residential and mixed use buildings should be sited and oriented to overlook public streets, parks and walkways.

8.0 Parking

General guidelines

8.1 Where possible, parking should be located underground or to the rear of buildings to minimize the impact on streetscape appearance and pedestrian amenity path and continuity, and to maximize ground level space for landscaping.

8.1.1 Underground parking entrances and garage doors should be designed and situated to provide an appealing entrance from the public street.

8.1.2 Where it is unavoidable to locate driveways and garage doors in building frontages, consideration should be given to the incorporation of these elements into building and landscaping design, by, for example, recessing behind the main building line, and breaking up of massing proportions.

8.1.3 When surface parking is unavoidable, it should be located at the rear of buildings. Landscape elements should be provided, such as planting or fencing, to visually break up and screen parking from public streets and adjacent properties, to improve natural drainage and to enhance pedestrian amenity.

8.2 Short-term parking areas and drop-off pull-ins should be designed so that pedestrian areas are distinctly delineated from vehicular traffic areas. Paving materials that mark pedestrian areas, set aside parking areas, and make walkways distinct from traffic lanes are desirable.

8.3 Use of high quality, permeable and durable paving materials in parking and pedestrian areas is encouraged. Paved surfaces with visual interest (e.g. eliminate curbs and/or use bollards, stamped concrete, unit pavers, etc.) should be provided. Generally, asphalt should be minimized by integrating a variety of paving materials, or by use of alternate surface treatments. Asphalt may be acceptable for industrial development.

8.4 The use of alternative modes of transportation should be promoted in site design (e.g. prominent bicycle racks for convenience and security; transit-supportive design features; building entrances oriented to pedestrian areas).

8.5 Visible and secure parking or storage should be provided for bicycles. Short-term bicycle parking should be sheltered, in well-lit locations, and clearly visible from a main building entrance and/or public roads. Bicycle storage facilities should be well-lit, and placed in a location with high volumes of pedestrian traffic.

9.0 Access and circulation

General guidelines

9.1 Site access and internal circulation should be designed to emphasize public safety at the intersections of public and private domains, internal security and efficient flows. Safe movement of pedestrians should be prioritized above all other modes of transportation.

9.2 Vehicle and pedestrian conflicts should be minimized in site design.

9.2.1 Vehicle access should be designed to minimize the impact on streetscape appearance and disruption to pedestrian movement.

9.2.2 Surface treatment, trees, plantings and street furnishings should identify the limits of the pedestrian domain, and create separation from vehicular movement.

9.3 Safe and easily identified access for pedestrians, bicycles and vehicles should be provided.

9.3.1 Pedestrian access to main and secondary entrances should be well marked, free of vehicles and emphasized in building and site design.

9.3.2 Vehicular access and egress routes should be defined well. On-site roadways should provide safe and convenient access for emergency vehicles, moving vans and service vehicles.

9.4 The use of gathering places for pedestrians is encouraged. Buildings should be connected and integrated with pedestrian-oriented open spaces, such as courtyards, gardens, patios and other landscaped areas.

10.0 Loading and service areas, ancillary mechanisms and unenclosed storage

General guidelines

10.1 Access to on-site loading and service areas for all uses should be as unobtrusive from the public realm as possible, appropriately shielded and protected from public streets.

10.2 Loading and service areas should be separate from sidewalks and other pedestrian areas to enhance safety.

10.2.1 Clear lines of sight to loading and servicing areas should be provided to enable casual surveillance.

10.3 Vents, mechanical rooms and equipment (including any equipment associated with window cleaning) and elevator penthouses should be integrated with architectural treatment of the building, and screened with high quality, durable finishes compatible with building design.

10.3.1 Placement of rooftop mechanical units and associated architectural treatments should take into account proximity to windows of adjacent residential buildings.

10.4 Location and installation of gas and electrical meters and their utility cabinets should be carefully integrated into building and site design.

10.4.1 Gas and electrical metres and utility cabinets on building frontages should be screened.

10.4.2 Location of utility cabinets or pedestals at intersections, on streets in areas of significant character, or on open space at side of streets, should be avoided.

Additional guidelines

*The following guidelines are specific to **industrial** and industrial mixed-use development and building additions:*

10.5 Areas on site that are permitted to be used for seasonal unenclosed storage should be identified and not interfere with sight lines for pedestrians, cyclists, or vehicular traffic.

10.6 Unenclosed storage should be screened from adjacent roads and residential properties through fencing or landscaping.

10.7 The location of unenclosed storage is discouraged within any landscape area, unless integrated with landscaping in a visually discrete manner that does not damage or destroy living elements, and does not interfere with sight lines.