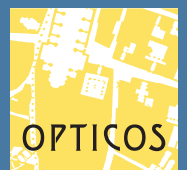




# Boise Design Guidelines Diagnosis + Recommendations

City of Boise

Screencheck Draft  
**March 22, 2024**



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# What's Inside?

## Boise Design Guidelines Diagnosis and Recommendations

**Introduction** 5

**Diagnosis** 13

**Recommendations** 41









# Introduction

CHAPTER 1

## In this chapter

1.1 Project Background	6
1.2 Planning Context	8
1.3 Project Approach	9
1.4 Design Principles	10

# 1.1 Project Background

**Boise is attracting more development projects citywide compared to past decades.** In response to this increased development activity, the City of Boise wants to ensure that new development achieves the quality and character reflective of the community's values.

Since 2012, **Boise has used design guidelines as one tool to influence the built environment's quality and character.** Under these design guidelines, commercial and multifamily developments have been subject to guidance pertaining to elements like Streetscape and Frontages, Site Design, Building Design and Materials.

**The built results under these guidelines are of mixed quality.** While some of

the most beloved recent construction has been built under these design guidelines, there are also examples of new development that falls short of the city's and community's expectations in terms of design quality and building form.

In order to ensure that the oncoming wave of new development in Boise meets the community's expectations, **the City has initiated this review of the existing design guidelines and sought recommendations to be considered in any future revisions to the design guidelines.**

*Right: Construction scenes in Downtown Boise, November 2023. Boise is attracting more development projects citywide.*





Sample Buildings Approved Under Today's Design Guidelines



Multi-unit residential infill building



Three-story apartment building in neighborhood context



Downtown Residence Inn hotel building



Mixed-use apartment building



Mixed-use apartment building



11th and Idaho office building

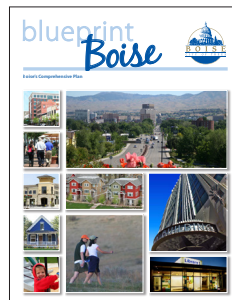
## 1.2 Planning Context

To set the stage for a review of the design guidelines, we should understand the planning context at the time of their creation and the planning context today.

### 1960s Zoning Code

Until 2023, Boise's land development was regulated by a zoning code dating from the mid-1960's. **This zoning code was typical of its time as it presumed auto-oriented development** rather than pedestrian-oriented development. This zoning code was also silent on many building design issues that would later be addressed through design guidelines.

### 2011 Comprehensive Plan



*Blueprint Boise*, the City's Comprehensive Plan, was adopted in 2011. This plan describes principles, goals, and policies for a variety of themes

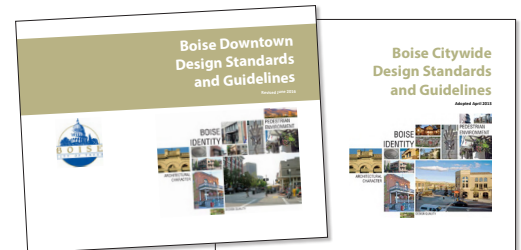
including environmental stewardship, a connected community, and a predictable development pattern.

*Blueprint Boise* included as a principle to "emphasize the importance of high-quality urban design in the built environment" and **provided policy direction to develop design standards to support this high-quality design** (*Blueprint Boise* p. 2-40).

The plan also includes design principles for various place types, including mixed-use activity centers, neighborhoods, and corridors. These principles establish a

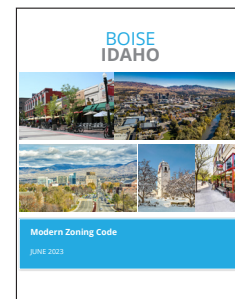
vision that new development in Boise have a pedestrian orientation, visual interest, and contextual sensitivity.

### 2013 Design Guidelines



In the context of *Blueprint Boise* and catalyzed by controversial new development downtown, Boise adopted two design guidelines documents in 2013: **Boise Citywide Design Standards and Guidelines** and **Boise Downtown Design Standards and Guidelines**.

### 2023 Modern Zoning Code



In 2023, Boise adopted an **overhauled zoning code** for the first time in six decades. Called the *Modern Zoning Code*, this re-tooled code includes standards

that support *Blueprint Boise*'s vision for **mixed-use, walkable environments** and **anticipates infill development within existing neighborhoods** as opposed to suburban sprawl.

The *Modern Zoning Code* also includes standards that regulate building form, including some topics that were previously only addressed through design guidelines.



# 1.3 Project Approach

## Process

The City of Boise engaged Opticos Design, a California-based urban design and planning firm with national expertise in design guidelines and zoning standards, to conduct this analysis of existing design guidelines. Hiring an outside firm enabled the project team to come to Boise with fresh eyes and conduct an objective analysis.

The study began with a two-day fact-finding trip during which staff led the project team on walking and driving tours throughout Boise to document recent and historic development and understand the City's perspective and goals.

The project team also conducted a series of stakeholder interviews to understand the perspectives of Boiseans who have used the design guidelines in the past. The City convened a diverse group of stakeholders for one-on-one interviews with the project team. Stakeholders represented multiple perspectives from the Design Guidelines Committee, the development community, and the design community.

## Components

This analysis of Boise's design guidelines includes two parts:

### Diagnosis (Chapter Two)

This component analyzes what is working well and what is not working well under the existing design guidelines.

First, this diagnosis presents a series of case studies including both buildings that stakeholders held up as exemplars and buildings that the stakeholders held in lower regard, and compare these buildings against the design guidelines. The case studies also evaluate these built results against design principles presented in Section 1.4 (Design Principles).

Then, the diagnosis assesses each individual design guideline in light of insights gained from the case studies.

### Recommendations (Chapter Three)

This component presents recommendations for adjustments to the design guidelines in light of the new content in the Modern Zoning Code and the findings from the case studies described above.

# 1.4 Design Principles

These six principles are based upon the vision articulated in the existing design guidelines, City input, and stakeholder feedback. They will be used throughout Chapter Two (Diagnosis) to evaluate built outcomes produced under the design guidelines.

## PEDESTRIAN EXPERIENCE

### Principle

1

#### Ground Floor Building Design

Design the building's ground floor to engage and provide context appropriate transitions to the public realm



## BUILDING DESIGN

### Principle

4

#### Façade Composition

Organize and compose building facades to be simple and well-proportioned using architectural features like openings and exterior elements



**Principle**

2

**Walkable Site Design**

Promote pedestrian connectivity to surrounding neighborhood by prioritizing pedestrian paths of travel, and develop large sites in a walkable street and block pattern

**Principle**

3

**Public Frontage Design**

Design the publicly accessible streetscape along the front of the building to reinforce the pedestrian realm

**Principle**

5

**Building Massing**

In neighborhood contexts, modulate the mass and bulk of buildings to be of similar scale with surrounding development; in block-scale contexts, compose block faces as a series of well-composed facades

**Principle**

6

**Materials**

Emphasize local and enduring materials like sandstone and brick, and/or consider careful detailing of less durable materials









# Diagnosis

CHAPTER

# 2

## In this chapter

<b>2.1</b> Alignment Between Design Guidelines + Design Principles	14
<b>2.2</b> Outcomes Under Design Guidelines	16
<b>2.3</b> Measuring Effectiveness	21
<b>2.4</b> Analysis of Design Guidelines	24

## 2.1 Alignment Between Design Guidelines + Design Principles

Chapter 1 concluded with a series of six design principles based upon the design guidelines' stated vision, City input, and stakeholder feedback. Chapter 2 will rely on these design principles to evaluate the following questions:

- How fully is each design principle implemented through the design guidelines?
- Where is there alignment or misalignment between the design principles and the design guidelines?

There is substantial alignment between many of the design principles and the design guidelines, as shown in the table on the facing page.

### Design Principles

- 1 Ground Floor Building Design**  
Design the building's ground floor to engage and provide context appropriate transitions to the public realm
- 2 Walkable Site Design**  
Promote pedestrian connectivity to surrounding neighborhood by prioritizing pedestrian paths of travel, and develop large sites in a walkable street and block pattern
- 3 Public Frontage Design**  
Design the publicly accessible streetscape along the front of the building to reinforce the pedestrian realm
- 4 Facade Composition**  
Organize and compose building facades to be simple and well-proportioned using architectural features like openings and exterior elements
- 5 Building Massing**  
In neighborhood contexts, modulate the mass and bulk of buildings to be of similar scale with surrounding development; in block-scale contexts, compose block faces as a series of well-composed facades
- 6 Materials**  
Emphasize local and enduring materials like sandstone and brick, and/or consider careful detailing of less durable materials



Design Guidelines Table of Contents and Applicable Design Principles			
Citywide	Downtown	Guideline	Principle
1.1	1.1	Site Context	–
1.2	1.2	Sustainable Design	2
2.1	2.1	Downtown Urban/Community Design Framework Maps	–
2.2	2.2	Block Frontage and Standards	1 3 4
3.1	N/A	Building Location & Orientation	1 3
3.2	3.1	Non-Motorized Circulation & Connections	2 3
3.3	3.2	Vehicular Circulation & Connections	2
3.4	3.3	Parking Structures & Drive Through Lanes	1 4
3.5	3.4	Internal Open Space/Design	2
3.6	3.5	High Visibility Street Corners & Gateway Sites	5
3.7	3.6	Service Area Location & Design	4
3.8	Streetscape Standards Manual	Landscaping Design	1 3
4.1	4.1	Architectural Character	4
4.2	4.2	Building Massing & Articulation	5
4.3	4.3	Building Elements & Details	4
4.4	4.4	Building Materials	6
4.5	4.5	Building Lighting	3
4.6	4.6	Blank Wall Treatments	4
4.7	N/A	Industrial Buildings	1

# 2.2 Outcomes Under Design Guidelines

This Chapter will evaluate the Downtown Design Guidelines and Citywide Design Guidelines.

To inform the evaluation of the guidelines, the team tested their application on a number of real development applications in order to understand the design guidelines' functionality and evaluate the kinds of outcomes they produce. These case studies are introduced on the following pages and will reappear throughout the design guidelines commentary in this chapter.




Note: For conciseness, design principles and design guidelines are referred to by their numbers in this section. **Refer back to Section 2.1 for the text of the each design principle and the name of each design guideline.**

## Metrics to Measure Outcomes

The case studies are summarized with three metrics: community regard, design principles, and design guidelines.




### Community Regard

This metric indicates general community reception to this building, based upon interviews with stakeholders and the knowledge of City staff.

-  Indicates positive design reputation
-  Indicates mixed design reputation
-  Indicates poor design reputation




### Design Principles

This metric refers to the design principles from Chapter 1 of this report. This metric is used to gauge the effectiveness of the design.

-  Indicates that a principle is reflected in design
-  Indicates that a principle is somewhat reflected in design
-  Indicates that a principle is lacking in design

### Design Guidelines

This metric measures compliance with the applicable design guidelines (Downtown or Citywide).

-  Indicates compliance with most guidelines (over two-thirds)
-  Indicates compliance with some but not all guidelines (over one-third)
-  Indicates minimal compliance with guidelines (one-third or less)



Case Studies

Evaluated Under Downtown Design Guidelines

- A

The Residence Inn  
[400 S Capitol Blvd, Boise, ID 83702](#)
- B

11th and Idaho Office Building  
[1100 W Idaho St, Boise, ID 83702](#)
- C

The Hearth  
[406 S 4th St, Boise, ID 83702](#)
- D

Jules on Third  
[412 S 3rd St, Boise, ID 83702](#)
- E

The Uncommon  
[914 W Royal Blvd, Boise, ID 83706](#)

Evaluated Under Citywide Design Guidelines

- F

Franklin Orchard Mixed-Use Development  
[5007 Franklin Rd, Boise, ID 83705](#)
- G

Rave Laundry  
[10390 W State St, Boise, ID 8371](#)

Case Study A

The Residence Inn



Metrics to Measure Outcome

Community Regard	Design Principles	Downtown Design Guidelines			
<div></div>	1	<div></div>	1.1	4.1	<div></div>
	2	<div></div>	1.2	4.2	<div></div>
	3	<div></div>	2.1	4.3	<div></div>
	4	<div></div>	2.2	4.4	<div></div>
	5	<div></div>	3.1	4.5	<div></div>
	6	<div></div>	3.2	4.6	<div></div>
			3.3		
			3.4		
			3.5		
			3.6		

Summary

This building scores relatively high under the design guidelines, but scores poorly under community regard and the design principles.

Case Study B

11th and Idaho  
Office Building



Metrics to Measure Outcome

Community Regard	Design Principles	Downtown Design Guidelines			
<div></div>	1	<div></div>	1.1	4.1	<div></div>
	2	<div></div>	1.2	4.2	<div></div>
	3	<div></div>	2.1	4.3	<div></div>
	4	<div></div>	2.2	4.4	<div></div>
	5	<div></div>	3.1	4.5	<div></div>
	6	<div></div>	3.2	4.6	<div></div>
			3.3		
			3.4		
			3.5		
			3.6		

Summary

This building scores high under all metrics. It complies with the design guidelines while also earning community appreciation and embodying the design principles.

Case Study C

The Hearth



Metrics to Measure Outcome

Community Regard	Design Principles	Downtown Design Guidelines			
<div></div>	1	<div></div>	1.1	4.1	<div></div>
	2	<div></div>	1.2	4.2	<div></div>
	3	<div></div>	2.1	4.3	<div></div>
	4	<div></div>	2.2	4.4	<div></div>
	5	<div></div>	3.1	4.5	<div></div>
	6	<div></div>	3.2	4.6	<div></div>
			3.3		
			3.4		
			3.5		
			3.6		


Summary

This building meets most of the applicable design guidelines. It scores high under community regard and the design principles.



Case Study D

Jules on Third



Metrics to Measure Outcome


Community Regard	Design Principles	Downtown Design Guidelines			
<div></div>	1	<div></div>	1.1	4.1	<div></div>
	2	<div></div>	1.2	4.2	<div></div>
	3	<div></div>	2.1	4.3	<div></div>
	4	<div></div>	2.2	4.4	<div></div>
	5	<div></div>	3.1	4.5	<div></div>
	6	<div></div>	3.2	4.6	<div></div>
		3.3			
		3.4			
		3.5			
		3.6			

Summary

This building has the most non-compliance on the design guidelines across the case studies. It also scores poorly under community regard and the design principles.

Case Study E

The Uncommon



Metrics to Measure Outcome

Community Regard	Design Principles	Downtown Design Guidelines			
<div></div>	1	<div></div>	1.1	4.1	<div></div>
	2	<div></div>	1.2	4.2	<div></div>
	3	<div></div>	2.1	4.3	<div></div>
	4	<div></div>	2.2	4.4	<div></div>
	5	<div></div>	3.1	4.5	<div></div>
	6	<div></div>	3.2	4.6	<div></div>
		3.3			
		3.4			
		3.5			
		3.6			

Summary

This building meets some of the design guideline metrics. It scores poorly under community regard and the design principles.

Case Study F

Franklin Orchard  
Mixed-Use Dev.



Metrics to Measure Outcome

Community Regard	Design Principles		Citywide Design Guidelines			
<div></div>	1	<div></div>	1.1		3.7	<div></div>
	2	<div></div>	1.2		3.8	<div></div>
	3	<div></div>	2.1		4.1	<div></div>
	4	<div></div>	2.2	<div></div>	4.2	<div></div>
	5	<div></div>	3.1	<div></div>	4.3	<div></div>
	6	<div></div>	3.2	<div></div>	4.4	<div></div>
			3.3		4.5	
			3.4		4.6	<div></div>
			3.5	<div></div>	4.7	
			3.6			

Summary

This development meets most of the applicable design guidelines. It scores fairly well under community regard and the design principles.



















Case Study G

Rave Laundry



Image Credit: Google Earth

Metrics to Measure Outcome

Community Regard		Design Principles	Citywide Design Guidelines		
	1		1.1	3.7	
	2		1.2	3.8	
	3		2.1	4.1	
	4		2.2	 4.2	
	5		3.1	4.3	
	6		3.2	 4.4	
			3.3	4.5	
			3.4	4.6	
			3.5	4.7	
			3.6		

Summary

This development scores well under the applicable design guidelines, but scores poorly under community regard and the design principles.



## 2.3 Measuring Effectiveness

### Methodology

This section **analyzes the effectiveness of the design guidelines and design principles** in producing buildings that the community appreciates, based on the case study analysis from Section 2.2.

This section compares the compliance of exemplar buildings with the compliance of non-exemplar buildings to illuminate how these principles or guidelines align or misalign with desirable built results.

"Exemplars" are case studies that have a green Community Regard rating, meaning that they are appreciated by the community as examples of good design. Non-exemplars are case studies that have a red Community Regard rating, meaning that they are examples of the kind of design that the community dislikes and does not want to see in Boise's future.

A tallying exercise produced the results in the tables below. The green, yellow, and red ratings in this section reflect the average case studies' ratings from Section 2.2.

### Effectiveness Ratings

Effectiveness is rated on a three-tiered scale. Comparing the exemplar compliance to non-exemplar compliance yielded three situations:



**Generally effective.** Guideline compliance aligns with exemplary design, suggesting that this guideline is effective.



**Questionable effectiveness.** Guideline is generally met by all case studies, suggesting one of the following possibilities:





- This guideline does not do enough to guide applicants to desirable results
- This guideline's topic may not significantly shape community regard
- Case studies do not present enough information




















**Generally ineffective.** Guideline compliance actually aligns with non-exemplary design, suggesting that this guideline is producing results that are opposite of what the community wants to see.

## Effectiveness of Design Principles



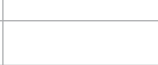
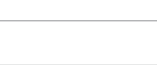


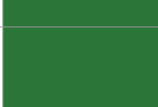











### Key

	Mostly compliant
	Somewhat compliant
	Mostly non-compliant
	N/A / Not enough information

	Generally effective
	Questionable effectiveness
	Generally ineffective

Summary of Exemplar Compliance with Design Principles			
Design Principle	Exemplar Compliance	Non-Exemplar Compliance	Effectiveness Assessment
1. Ground Floor Building Design			
2. Site Design			N/A
3. Public Frontage Design			
4. Facade Composition			
5. Building Massing			
6. Materials			

## Effectiveness of Design Guidelines

Summary of Exemplar Compliance with Design Guidelines					
Citywide	Downtown	Guideline	Exemplar Compliance	Non-Exemplar Compliance	Effectiveness Assessment
1.1	1.1	Site Context			N/A
1.2	1.2	Sustainable Design			N/A
2.1	2.1	Community Design Framework			N/A
2.2	2.2	Block Frontages and Standards			
3.1	N/A	Building Location & Orientation			
3.2	3.1	Non-Motorized Circulation & Connections			
3.3	3.2	Vehicular Circulation & Connections			

Overall Effectiveness of Design Guidelines (Continued)					
Citywide	Downtown	Guideline	Exemplar Compliance	Non-Exemplar Compliance	Assessment
3.4	3.3	Parking Structures & Drive Through Lanes			
3.5	3.4	Internal Open Space/Design			
3.6	3.5	High Visibility Street Corners & Gateway Signs			
3.7	3.6	Service Area Locations & Design			
3.8	N/A	Landscaping Design			
4.1	4.1	Architectural Character			
4.2	4.2	Building Massing and Articulation			
4.3	4.3	Building Elements & Details			
4.4	4.4	Building Materials			
4.5	4.5	Building Lighting			
4.6	4.6	Blank Wall Treatments			
4.7	N/A	Industrial Buildings			N/A



## 2.4 Analysis of Design Guidelines

This section will evaluate each individual design guideline from both the Citywide and the Downtown Design Guidelines.

Each guideline will be analyzed as follows:

**Purpose.** What is this guideline intending to do?

**Relationship to Design Principles.** Which principle(s) does this guideline relate to, and how successfully does it align with that principle?

**Case Studies.** How did this design guideline apply to the case studies evaluated and what did those case studies demonstrate about the guideline?

**Assessment.** What is the overall diagnosis of this guideline?

Evaluations of each guideline will inform the recommendations in Chapter 3.

## DOWNTOWN + CITYWIDE

## 1.1

## Site Context

**This section is a checklist to help the applicant gather information and does not include any specific guidelines.**

## DOWNTOWN + CITYWIDE

## 1.2

## Sustainable Design

**Purpose**

This guideline presents nine topics related to sustainability, such as sunlight, wind, and water, and asks applicants to demonstrate or describe how their proposal responds to each.

**Relationship to Design Principles**

The guidance in this guideline overlaps with Principle 2, Site Design, as it relates to site connectivity.

However, this guideline also includes several topics that do not directly relate to urban design goals and deal with sustainability goals instead.

**Case Studies**

The sample development applications reviewed generally did not include information about conformance with these sustainability guidelines.

**Assessment**

This guideline includes laudable goals for sustainability, but is short on resources, techniques, and metrics. Its vague composition may explain the lack of responsiveness to this guideline in development applications.

- Many objectives may be sufficiently covered by the building code or the Modern Zoning Code
- Other components of the review process may be more effective at delivering Sustainable Design than Design Review

## DOWNTOWN + CITYWIDE

## 2.1

## Framework Maps

**This section is a set of maps that designate block frontage types on key streets. Associated guidelines are located in Guideline 2.2.**

## DOWNTOWN + CITYWIDE

## 2.2

## Block Frontages + Standards



*The Uncommon's facade along the greenbelt was not subject to frontage standards, resulting in a facade of mostly inactive wall.*



*Jules on 3rd has long visible expanses of a three-story parking podium, raising questions about enforcement of this guideline.*

### Purpose

This guideline covers frontage design—a critical urban design topic—and uses a series of key maps to designate different frontage types for different kinds of intended environments throughout Boise.

### Relationship to Design Principles

This guideline overlaps with Principle 1, Ground Floor Building Design, in its guidance on active ground floor depth and facade design and with Principle 3, Public Frontage Design, in its guidance on the design of publicly accessible pedestrian space along property edges.

### Case Studies

The case studies ran into several issues under this guideline:

- **Parking garage frontage and screening.** Jules on 3rd has extensive exposed parking that is visible from the sidewalk. The application was granted a departure by the committee but it is not clear on what grounds this departure was granted.

- **Sufficiently deep or extensive weather protection elements.** The Hearth lacks qualifying weather protection along 50% of its storefront frontage lengths. The Uncommon includes required weather protection elements but all are shallower than the required 5' depth.

- **Application of frontage types to public open spaces.** The Uncommon and The Franklin Orchard Mixed-Use Development both include facades along important public open spaces. The Uncommon faces the greenbelt, and The Franklin Orchard Mixed-Use Development faces Franklin Park. Neither of these frontages have any requirements attached to them, which seems like a missed opportunity.

- **Entries facing the street.** Rave Laundry does not have customer entrances facing either street. Since its frontage was designated "other", there was more flexibility on this standard allowing an entry "visible and directly accessible from the street" instead. The entry to Rave Laundry faces the rear parking lot, but is visible from Jennie Lane. Although the guideline was met, the outcome is undesirable.

### Assessment

- Parking garage frontage and screening needs reconsideration
- Some key building frontages that face public open spaces would benefit from being subject to frontage type standards
- Many frontage elements may be more effectively regulated in the Modern Zoning Code providing opportunities to eliminate inconsistency and redundancy



## CITYWIDE

## 3.1

## Building Location + Orientation

**Purpose**

This guideline aims to place and orient buildings in a way that contributes to an active pedestrian realm.

**Relationship to Design Principles**

Much like Guideline 2.2, this guideline overlaps with Principle 1, Ground Floor Building Design, in its guidance on active ground floor depth and facade design and with Principle 3, Public Frontage Design, in its guidance on the design of publicly accessible pedestrian space along property edges.

**Case Studies**

The Franklin Orchard Mixed-Use Development case study analyzed under this guideline was compliant and did not highlight any issues with the guideline itself. In aligning with the guidelines, the proposal is generally successful in promoting a pedestrian-oriented streetscape. The Rave Laundry case study also met the applicable sections of this guideline but revealed a need to clarify when this guideline is applicable instead of 2.2 Block Frontages + Standards and highlighted redundancy between the two standards.

**Assessment**

- This guideline includes many objective standards, including building placement and parking location, that have been revised and included in the Modern Zoning Code. Identify elements now regulated in the Modern Zoning Code and eliminate inconsistency and redundancy.
- There is some redundancy between this guideline and Section 2.2.

## DOWNTOWN/CITYWIDE

## 3.1/3.2

## Non-Motorized Circulation + Connections

**Purpose**

This guideline relates to the design of non-vehicular paths throughout large sites.

**Relationship to Design Principles**

This guideline overlaps with Principle 2, Site Design in its vision for pedestrian connectivity and Principle 3 in its guidance on the design of specific public frontage elements like sidewalks.

**Case Studies**

Case studies did not raise concerns with this guideline.

**Assessment**

This guideline captures several topics important to the design of the pedestrian

realm, including easily-understood and objective standards for elements like sidewalk or pathway width. There is an opportunity to:

- There may be an opportunity to combine some of these dimensional standards with frontage standards, especially relating to widths of landscaping and sidewalks
- These standards could be combined with expanded guidance for multi-block redevelopment to create a development pattern that promotes walkability
- Pedestrian circulation and pathways may be more effectively regulated in the Modern Zoning Code providing opportunities to eliminate inconsistency and redundancy

## DOWNTOWN/CITYWIDE

## 3.2/3.3

## Vehicular Circulation + Connections

**Purpose**

This guideline envisions vehicular circulation design on large, multi-block developments.

**Relationship to Design Principles**

This guideline aligns with Principle 2, Site Design in its vision for overall site connectivity.

**Case Studies**

This guideline was not applicable to any of the case studies as they were infill projects that occupy parcels within an existing circulation network.

**Assessment**

- While this guideline provides good guidance on key circulation topics, this guideline lacks guidance for large sites that may be creating a new multi-block circulation system

## DOWNTOWN/CITYWIDE

## 3.3/3.4

## Parking Structures + Drive-Through Lanes



*The Hearth provides screening from parking along the Myrtle Street Facade. While it is fairly successfully incorporated into the overall facade design, it is questionable whether parking should have been allowed in this location at all.*

### Purpose

This guideline governs the design of two elements that are notoriously difficult to design well in a pedestrian-oriented environment: parking structures and drive-through lanes. The guideline addresses both where parking is placed on a site relative to other building components and the screening of parking when it is exposed.

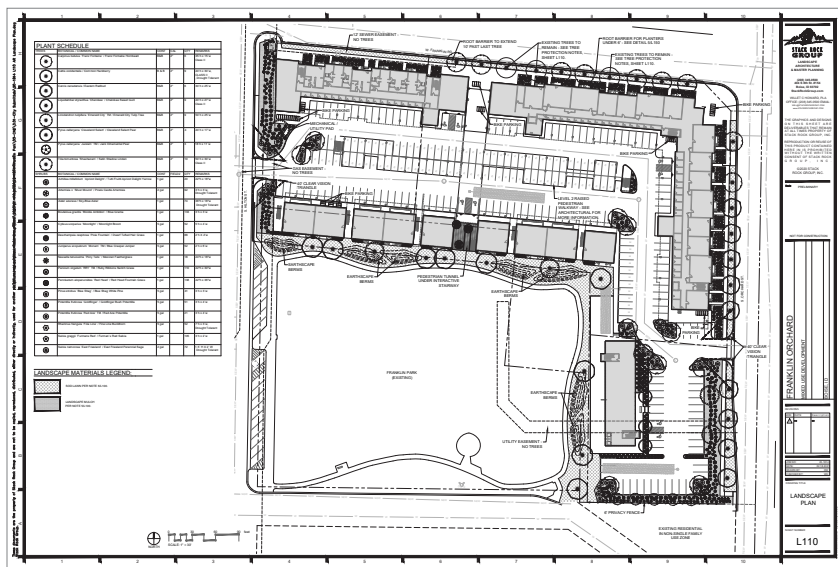
### Relationship to Design Principles

This guideline relates to Principle 1, Ground Floor Design insofar as it relates to ground floor active uses, and to Principle 4, Facade Composition, insofar as it relates to visually appealing facade design.

### Case Studies

While none of the case studies included a drive-through, several case studies incorporate structured parking with varying levels of design success. They offer the following lesson:

*Franklin Orchard Mixed-Use Development generally surrounds parking with leasable, active space.*



- **Screening structured parking may be helpful, but can't make up for poor parking placement.** Jules on 3rd and The Hearth both located structured parking on Myrtle Street, a major thoroughfare, and provided screening. They screened with varying levels of success but did not result in a meaningful contribution to the public realm.

### Assessment

- This guideline includes design guidance for structured parking along a facade but does not have tight limits on either width allowed or number of consecutive stories allowed
- There may be an opportunity to coordinate structured parking standards with frontage standards, e.g. designated frontages are prohibited from parking placement along a facade
- Parking placement may be more effectively regulated in the Modern Zoning Code providing opportunities to eliminate inconsistency and redundancy
- Drive-through uses may be more effectively regulated in the Modern Zoning Code than in design guidelines



DOWNTOWN/CITYWIDE

# 3.4/3.5 Internal Open Space/Design

## Purpose

This guideline aims to produce diverse open spaces within development projects.

## Relationship to Design Principles

This guideline overlaps with the intent of Principle 2, Site Design, in its goal to provide meaningful and well-designed open space separate from the right-of-way. The content in this guideline is likely insufficient to meet this principle based on the scale of space required.

## Case Studies

In conversation with staff, it became clear that the open space requirement for non-residential uses is often loosely interpreted so that the pedestrian-oriented space is located in the right-of-way (i.e. not on the property). This raises the questions:

- Why are applicants failing to meet the letter of this guideline? Is this guideline too onerous?

- Does pedestrian-oriented space in the right-of-way satisfy the intent as well as pedestrian-oriented space on a private parcel? If so, revise this standard.

## Assessment

- Design criteria for pedestrian-oriented space overlaps with frontage type standards
- This guideline includes criteria for what counts towards meeting multi-family open space, which seems like it belongs in the zoning code
- Many components in this guideline are merely "encouraged"
- The scale of required open space for non-residential uses (less than 2% of project area) may provide room for an entry feature or similar, but is not enough for a meaningful civic space or park space in small parcel infill environments

The small percentage of open space required in this guideline is not meaningful on small parcel infill environments.

### 3.5 Internal Open Space / Design

#### Intent:

- To create a variety of pedestrian areas in retail and mixed-use developments;
- To provide safe, attractive, and usable open spaces that promote pedestrian activity;
- To create usable space that is suitable for leisure and recreational activities for residents;
- To create open space that enhances the setting and character of residential, commercial, and mixed-use development; and
- To promote a variety of open spaces for multifamily uses.

#### Standards/Guidelines:

##### 3.5.1 Open space requirements for non-residential uses.

All non-residential development (including commercial portions of mixed use development) more than one acre in size within Commercial, Office, and Health Service districts shall provide pedestrian-oriented space equal to at least one percent of the net project area plus one percent of the gross non-residential building floor area, exclusive of structured parking. Service areas and storage uses are exempt from this standard. The intent is to mitigate the impacts of large scale commercial development and to contribute to the desired pedestrian-oriented character of Boise's Activity Centers and business districts. Pedestrian-oriented space shall comply with the design provisions of Provision 3.5.2 below.

Fig. 3-26. Illustrating the amount of pedestrian-oriented space required for non-residential development.

Fig. 3-27. Examples of pedestrian-oriented space.

Fig. 3-28. A good example in configuring usable pedestrian-oriented space into a neighborhood center development.

## DOWNTOWN/CITYWIDE

## 3.5/3.6

## High-Visibility Corners + Gateway Sites

**Purpose**

This guideline provides options for building placement or landscaping treatment at key corners and gateways.

**Relationship to Design Principles**

This guideline relates to Principle 5, Building Massing, in its desire for built form to emphasize enclosure at important intersections.

However, the guideline includes several alternatives for compliance that do not require any particular building placement and would be less successful at locations that are actually intended to be high-visibility corners or gateways.

**Case Studies**

This guideline was applicable to the Residence Inn at the intersection of Myrtle Street and Capitol Boulevard. To satisfy the guideline, this case study followed 3.5.1 Street Corner Treatments Option 2, "provide pedestrian-oriented space at the corner leading directly to a building entry". However, the building entry leads into the parking garage making it less successful due to the inactive ground floor use.

**Assessment**

- The building placement component of this guideline may be more effectively regulated in the Modern Zoning Code providing opportunities to eliminate inconsistency and redundancy
- It is not clear whether pedestrian-oriented space would be additive to these sites and whether this kind of space would be utilized without an adjacent building frontage
- The locations envisioned by this guideline could benefit from special additional massing allowances, like taller corner elements, that could help distinguish gateways
- Requiring an entry point at the corner may not be sufficient if ground floor use is not regulated at these corners

## DOWNTOWN/CITYWIDE

## 3.6/3.7 Service Area Location + Design

**Purpose**

This guideline provides screening criteria for service elements and mechanical equipment.

**Relationship to Design Principles**

This guideline serves Principle 4, Facade Composition, in screening utilitarian and visually unappealing elements from view.

**Case Studies**

All case studies evaluated were compliant with this guideline.

**Assessment**

- This guideline is concise, clear and was successfully met in all case studies.

## CITYWIDE

## 3.8 Landscaping Design

**Purpose**

This guideline provides landscape design standards for landscape buffers.

**Relationship to Design Principles**

This guideline is loosely related to Principle 1, Ground Floor Building Design, insofar as it relates to controlling the pedestrian-level experience. However, its premise is that the pedestrian-level uses require screening, which is not consistent with this principle.

**Case Studies**

Franklin Orchard Mixed-Use Development was compliant with all components of this guideline except surface parking lot landscaping standards. Rave Laundry was

compliant with all components of this guideline.

**Assessment**

- This guideline would benefit from concentrating on situations where screening is appropriate. Currently, it is broadly applicable to anything other than detached single-family homes that abut residential uses. Screening is not necessary in all of these situations.
- Landscape requirements may be more effectively regulated in the Boise City Code providing opportunities to eliminate inconsistency and redundancy



## DOWNTOWN + CITYWIDE

## 4.1

## Architectural Character

**Purpose**

This standard aims to promote "original and distinctive" architectural design.

**Relationship to Design Principles**

This guideline overlaps with Principle 4, Facade Composition. However, its emphasis on the distinctiveness of each individual facade does not necessarily align with the simple and rational focus of Principle 4.

**Case Studies**

Case studies highlighted the following aspects of this design guideline:

■ **Landmark buildings are treated with extra exemptions rather than extra requirements.** As a prominent hotel, the Residence Inn qualifies as a "landmark" building under this guideline and is therefore exempt from some block frontage and building massing provisions. The result has a mixed reputation among stakeholders and is not lifted up as an exemplary design outcome.

■ **Base/middle/top component of guideline was loosely met by "exemplar" buildings.** The Hearth and 11th and Idaho, buildings that resonated with stakeholders as design exemplars, could be interpreted as compliant with this guideline, although their base/middle/top distinction was quite subtle with no substantial material or massing change. Their light-touch tripartite articulation might be attributed to their contemporary architectural style, which does not typically include strong articulation of base/middle/top. The Uncommon and Jules on 3rd were

noncompliant with this guideline and were not lifted up by stakeholders as exemplar designs.

**Assessment**

- This guideline promotes some aspects of design that were emphasized by stakeholders (such as layered facade compositions) but its emphasis on "distinctiveness" seems contradictory to others (like rational simplicity in facade composition)
- This guideline includes a number of photo examples of "original and distinctive design" but as such a small catalogue, it is unclear how helpful these photo examples would be to an applicant
- This guideline distinguishes between "background" and "landmark" buildings. The contents of this guideline could be better focused on landmark buildings as those are buildings that ought to stand out in an urban landscape.
- Tripartite facade articulation can be more or less important to good design depending on both architectural style and the scale of a facade

DOWNTOWN + CITYWIDE

# 4.2

## Building Massing + Articulation

### Purpose

This guideline aims to reduce perceived scale of large buildings and clearly articulate building entries.

### Relationship to Design Principles

This guideline relates to Principle 5, Building Massing. However, this guideline's uniform direction to apply facade articulation, vertical building modulation, and roofline modulation at each set interval does not entirely align with the intent of Principle 5. The guideline specifies a greater degree of building articulation than Principle 5 would envision in certain contexts.

### Case Studies

■ **The facade articulation requirement was not met by the majority of cases studied.** Only 11th and Idaho satisfied the requirement to employ three listed

components in each facade interval. All other buildings failed to meet this requirement in at least some of their facade intervals; sometimes this resulted in a positive design outcome (e.g. The Hearth) and sometimes in a negative design outcome (e.g. The Uncommon). In either case, the failure of most buildings to meet this standard raises a question of its reasonableness.

■ **Roofline modulation compliance does not correspond with exemplary design.** 11th and Idaho does not provide roofline modulation and is held up as an exemplar building, while the Residence Inn provides ample roofline modulation yet is not an exemplar.

■ **Tower massing compliance was not met by two of the four case studies subject to this guideline.** The Hearth and the Residence Inn were in compliance, but 11th and Idaho and Jules on Third required departures. The tower massing standards were not applicable to the other case studies. 11th and Idaho failed to comply with the maximum floor plate allowed, the minimum street setbacks, and the minimum rear setback. Jules on Third failed to comply with the maximum floor plate allowed, the minimum setback from the alley, and the requirement for the tower to integrate with and extend into the building base. The departures resulted in a positive outcome in the case of 11th and Idaho, but the results were negative in the case of Jules on Third. If Jules on Third was required to follow the guideline without a departure, the built result would likely be improved.

*Compliance with roofline design standards did not correspond with exemplary design.*

**4.2.5 Cornice/roofline design.**  
Buildings employing a flat roof shall employ a original and distinctive roofline. Fig. 4-21 through Fig. 4-24 below illustrates acceptable and unacceptable examples.



Fig. 4-21. Acceptable cornice examples.

Modest horizontal length and greater vertical distance between windows and roof (than between windows on lower floors) helps. Articulated design over balconies. Change in materials, color, and texture helps.



Fig. 4-22. Although this building does not employ a traditional cornice line, its combination of facade/roofline articulation plus changes in color, texture, and materials lend it an original and distinctive roofline.



Fig. 4-23. While the cornice line, other than the dramatic corner cornice, is subdued, the color and material change of the top floor is an effective treatment that reduces the perceived scale of the building.



Fig. 4-24. Unacceptable cornice examples.

### Assessment

- This guideline seems to encourage a particular design approach to large buildings, which was described by several stakeholders as "cluttered"
- There is an opportunity to better address how massing and articulation can promote context-sensitive scale transitions between different environments or differently-scaled buildings
- This guideline does not adequately address different contexts that align with the locations and types of housing that the Modern Zoning Code expects

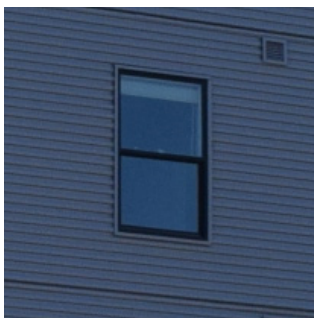
## DOWNTOWN + CITYWIDE

# 4.3

## Building Elements + Details



*The Hearth complied with window detailing standards.*



*The Uncommon did not comply with window detailing standards.*

### Purpose

This guideline encourages attractive pedestrian-scaled design detailing.

### Relationship to Design Principles

This guideline relates to Principle 4, Facade Composition in its promotion of attractive design details.

However, the approach of this design guideline may not fully align with Principle 4. This guideline provides a menu of options that must be incorporated into each facade interval.

Stakeholders raised concerns that this contributed to a suboptimal design mindset where uncoordinated elements could be attached to a building to meet this standard, in contrast to the simple and rational design approach that Principle 4 establishes.

### Case Studies

Case studies frequently required departures to achieve compliance with this guideline, as facades did not provide the listed elements in each facade articulation interval. Approximately half of the facade articulation intervals on The Uncommon, the Residence Inn, and the Franklin Orchard Mixed-Use Development would have required departures.

Compliance with the window detailing component of this guideline did correspond with attractive built results, as windows play a significant role in perception of facade depth and materiality. For example, buildings with deeper window recesses like The Hearth read as overall more durable and interesting, while The Uncommon was noncompliant with window recess minimums, contributing to a flat overall facade appearance.

### Assessment

- As articulated by stakeholders, this guideline's approach to design detailing risks promoting uncoordinated building details with a "more is better" mentality
- The qualifications for departures is quite vague in this guideline, which may explain the high number of case study instances that did not meet the letter of the law on this guideline
- Window detailing guidance did align with attractive window design



## DOWNTOWN + CITYWIDE

## 4.4

## Building Materials



*The Residence Inn uses a brick and stone base while cladding its tower in less expensive stone-colored paneling. This is a good example of prioritizing durable and high-quality materials at a building's base or ground floor.*

*The brick material choice at The Hearth is additive to its sense of quality, texture, and durability.*

### Purpose

This guideline promotes the use of high-quality and local building materials.

### Relationship to Design Principles

This guideline supports Principle 1, Ground Floor Design, in its emphasis on material selection at the building base. It also aligns with Principle 4, Facade Composition in its consideration of facade materiality.

### Case Studies

The case studies offered the following lessons relating to building materials:

- **The guideline's ground floor focus supported prioritizing the most durable materials at the ground floor level.** For example, The Residence Inn met the Downtown Design Guidelines' more specific material list for the ground floor, incorporating brick and stone, while incorporating less expensive siding into its tower. While this approach

has a positive impact on ground-floor experience, it may sometimes be at odds with good material choices across the building.

### Assessment

- While the intent of this guideline names a desire for local materials, the guideline itself does not address material origin
- This guideline approached the topic of less durable or attractive materials (like vinyl siding) by limiting the proportion of a facade that they can occupy
- Prioritization of material choice on ground floor may result in undesirable material choices elsewhere on the building with negative impacts on overall building durability
- Guidance on material detailing could benefit from refinement, particularly detailing on less durable materials (stucco exemplar is particularly poor)



## CITYWIDE

## 4.7

# Industrial Buildings

## Purpose

This guideline sets standards for building entry design for industrial buildings with an office or customer-use component.

## Relationship to Design Principles

This guideline relates to Principle 1, Ground Floor Design, as it focuses on building entrances.

## Case Studies

This guideline was not applicable to any cases studied.

## Assessment

- This guideline is concise and clear and can promote legible entry design on industrial buildings

## DOWNTOWN + CITYWIDE

## 4.5

## Building Lighting

**Purpose**

This guideline promotes lighting design to spotlight architectural features and enhance pedestrian experience.

**Relationship to Design Principles**

This guideline supports Principle 3, Public Frontage Design.

**Case Studies**

Case studies generally did not include enough information to evaluate compliance with this guideline.

**Assessment**

- This guideline includes many features that are "encouraged" and may be worded too vaguely to be effective
- Consider whether there are objective standards to rely upon for light pollution concerns (e.g. "Dark Sky" standards) and whether these already exist elsewhere in City standards
- Based on the application materials in the case studies, there may be a process issue if the application materials at Design Review typically do not include enough information to effectively evaluate this topic
- Lighting may be more effectively regulated in the Modern Zoning Code providing opportunities to eliminate inconsistency and redundancy



## DOWNTOWN + CITYWIDE

## 4.6

## Blank Wall Treatments

## Purpose

This guideline provides options for screening blank walls on street-facing facades.

## Relationship to Design Principles

This guideline relates to Principle 1, Ground Floor Building Design, insofar as it aims to mitigate an unpleasant ground-floor experience.

However, it only mitigates a building programming issue which places a blank wall along a pedestrian-oriented facade.

## Case Studies

Most case studies included blank walls, and all complied with this guideline to treat those blank walls. The Hearth and The Uncommon used metal screens, for example.

## Assessment

- This guideline promotes creative approaches to adding visual interest to blank walls, such as public art
- This guideline presumes that blank walls will appear on street-facing facades, which is something that the City could reconsider

### 4.6 Blank Wall Treatments

**Intent:**

- To promote building facades that enhance the pedestrian environment and the visual character of Boise.

**Standards/Guidelines:**

**4.6.1 Blank wall definition.**

A wall (including building facades and retaining walls) is considered a blank wall if it is over ten feet in height has a horizontal length greater than 24 feet and does not include a transparent window or door.

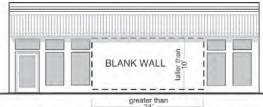


Fig. 4-44. Blank wall definition.




Fig. 4-45. Treatments are too insignificant given size of the wall, which in this example faces both a street and parking lot.





Fig. 4-46. Trees alone aren't enough to mitigate the negative impacts of this blank wall. Shrubs, vines, and architectural features would certainly help.

**4.6.2 Blank wall treatment standards.**

Untreated blank walls visible from a public street or pedestrian pathway are prohibited. Methods to treat blank walls can include:

- Display windows at least 16 inches of depth to allow for changeable displays. Back on display cases shall not qualify as a blank wall treatment;
- Landscape planting bed at least five feet wide or a raised planter bed at least two feet high and three feet wide in front of the wall with planting materials that are sufficient to obscure or screen at least 60 percent of the wall's surface within three years;
- Installing a vertical trellis in front of the wall with climbing vines or plant material;
- Installing a mural as approved by the governing authority; and/or
- Special building detailing that adds visual interest at a pedestrian scale. Such detailing must use a variety of surfaces; monotonous designs will not meet the purpose of the standards.

For large visible blank walls, a variety of treatments may be required to meet the purpose of the standards.



example, a blank wall slightly larger than the definition herein could be offset by high quality materials and design features and extensive window transparency in adjacent areas. Distinctive landscaping features in front of the facade could also be a mitigating factor.

Departures or blank walls sized larger than defined in Provision 4.6.1 will be considered provided the design of the applicable facades and site development features enhance the character of the area. Factors in determining whether a departure meets this criteria:

- Consider the prominence and visibility of the subject facade. The more prominent and visible the facade, the less flexibility should be given to departure proposals. For example, a lesser traveled and short side street might be granted more flexibility than a primary and highly visible through street. Context alone, however, must not be an excuse for an extensive blank wall (much larger than definition).
- Consider the design of the entire facade and other applicable streetscape and site development features that affect the character and visual interest of the building and the adjacent streetscape. For





Fig. 4-47. Examples of good blank wall treatment.



Citywide Boise Design Review Guidelines

Chapter 4 Building Design 87









# Recommendations

CHAPTER

3

<b>In this chapter</b>	
<b>3.1</b> Zooming Out: Big-Picture Recommendations	42
<b>3.2</b> Zooming In: Recommendations for Select Guidelines	46
<b>3.3</b> Recommendations Summary	49
<b>3.4</b> Implementation	51

## 3.1 Zooming Out: Big-Picture Recommendations

**Before considering recommendations for particular guidelines, let's zoom out to consider big-picture recommendations that could help the design guidelines best address the City's needs.**

### Landmark Buildings and Background Buildings

Buildings in Boise can be categorized as either landmark buildings (sometimes called "civic" buildings) or background buildings (sometimes called "fabric" buildings).

#### Landmark Buildings

A landmark building is meant to be designed in a way that is different from the general, common building within the city. It may be a public building or may be in a location that warrants some form of differentiation. The State Capitol building and the Boise Depot are examples of landmark buildings.

#### Background Buildings

A background building is a building that reinforces the city's prevailing public realm pattern. This type of building is not intended to be differentiated from its context. Rather, background buildings serve to reinforce the language, form, and scale of the context. The cohesion and simplicity of background buildings enable a sense of hierarchy in the built environment by allowing landmark buildings to stand out and visually communicate their importance.

Note that their "background" function does not mean that background buildings cannot be beautiful, unique buildings. On the contrary, it is appropriate for background buildings to be beautiful and

even incorporate ornate details, as long as the building still maintains a simple, rational design.

#### How Landmark and Background Buildings Are Evaluated Today

Landmark buildings receive exemptions from certain design guidelines under both the Downtown and Citywide Design Standards and Guidelines (Guideline 4.1.3, "Landmark Buildings - Design Considerations"). These buildings are permitted exemptions from frontage standards, building massing provisions, rooftop design, and building elements and detail provisions provided the design meets a list of required objectives. Background buildings, on the other hand, are subject to all applicable design guidelines.

#### Recommended Differentiation in Design Guidelines

While the design guidelines already take the approach of relaxing requirements for landmark buildings to enable distinctive design, guidance on landmark buildings could include clearer communication about what makes an exemplary landmark building and how it should differentiate itself from its surrounding context. Additional exemplars might be useful to support this policy direction.

The guidelines could also better reflect the secondary role that background buildings should play by removing emphasis on unique and distinctive



design. Currently, Design Guideline 4.1 begins with the intent statement "To promote original and distinctive building design", further articulated in guideline subsection 4.1.2 which applies to both background buildings and landmark buildings. While this may be an approach to landmark building design, it is not an appropriate approach to achieve a goal of well-designed background buildings that produce a cohesive built environment.

### Neighborhood Infill Context

The adoption of the Modern Zoning Code introduces the potential for new kinds of development in a variety of contexts, including development in and around neighborhoods that will be subject to design guidelines. The City has the opportunity to be proactive in providing guidance on how this newly anticipated development—which may be somewhat larger in scale than what exists today—should relate to the existing neighborhoods.

One topic that might become a larger focus area in the design guidelines is compatibility. Guidelines could help to articulate expectations around how new, larger buildings might be "good neighbors" to existing neighborhoods while providing the additional housing and/or mix of uses that is now allowed in these locations.

Currently, one key way that the design guidelines address building scale is through Guideline 4.2, "Building Massing and Articulation". Guideline 4.2.1 specifically addresses facade articulation in multifamily buildings, requiring a maximum module of 30 feet. However, this is a fixed module for multifamily buildings citywide, and could be calibrated to specific contexts (e.g. along corridors versus within house-scale neighborhoods). The exemplar photos currently picture multifamily buildings in isolation; exemplars of larger multifamily buildings within neighborhoods (where

they are likely to begin appearing) would help explain this concept.

It is certainly possible to have well-designed and well-scaled multifamily buildings that are complementary to single-family neighborhoods; pre-WWII neighborhoods around the United States are full of examples of this potential compatibility. Addressing this compatibility issue proactively would help the initial wave of new development in neighborhood contexts have positive outcomes that contribute to their neighborhoods, and avoid a backlash against providing much-needed multifamily housing in neighborhood contexts.

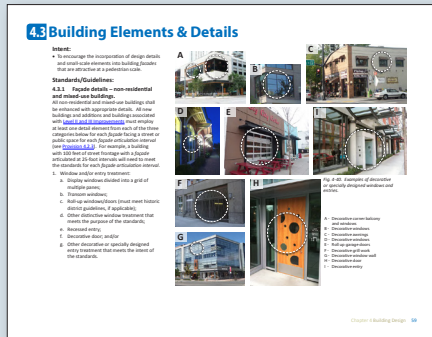
### Performance-Based, Form-Based, and Negotiated Approaches

There are three approaches to writing design guidelines: performance-based, form-based, and negotiated.

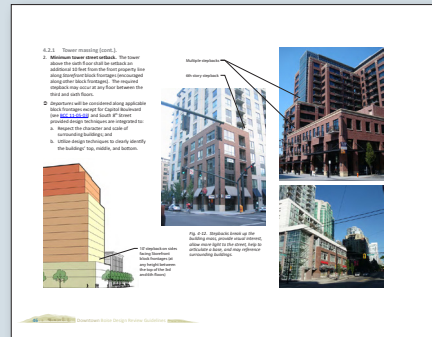
#### Performance-Based

Most of Boise's current design guidelines fall into this category. Performance-based design guidelines are based on quantifiable metrics. For example, a performance-based design guideline may ask the applicant to include at least three elements from a list of eight acceptable elements.

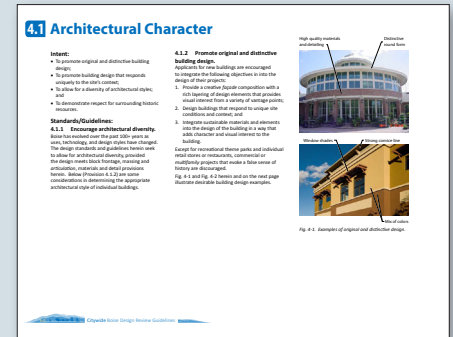
Performance-based design guidelines have the benefit of allowing the applicant freedom to choose from any combination of a number of options that are deemed acceptable. One downside of this type of guideline is that it is difficult to ensure predictably good results. The result may have elements of design that are desirable, but there is not a way to ensure that the individual pieces are cohesive in the building's overall design. Performance-based design guidelines can also introduce increased complexity to the process of reviewing and approving proposals.



Example of a **performance-based design guideline** from the Boise Downtown Design Standards and Guidelines. Guideline subsection 4.3.1 (Facade details) requires non-residential and mixed-use buildings to include at least one detail element from each of three categories.



Example of a **form-based design guideline** from the Boise Downtown Design Standards and Guidelines. Guideline subsection 4.2.1.2 (Minimum tower street setback) requires an objective standard for towers above the sixth floor to be setback a minimum of 10 feet along Storefront block frontages.



Example of a **negotiated design guideline** from the Boise Citywide Design Standards and Guidelines. Guideline subsection 4.1.2 (Promote original and distinctive building design) encourages buildings to integrate a list of three objectives supporting building design that is considered original and distinctive.

## Form-Based

Form-based design guidelines are written to result in a particular desired building form. For example, a form-based design guideline may include dimensional standards for required components of a shopfront.

Form-based design guidelines have the benefit of being clear and objective. They also offer predictable results that can ensure a base level quality of design. The downside of form-based guidelines is that their objectivity and rigidity may preclude out-of-the-box designs that are considered desirable.

## Negotiated

Design guidelines that are negotiated are subjective standards that rely on a robust design review process. They often take the form of design principles which communicate the general intent, but leave the interpretation of its applicability to a review body's discretion on a case-by-case basis.

Negotiated design guidelines have the benefit of accounting for the nuance of a particular design and allowing for design that meets the intent of the guideline without specifying a standard, one-size-fits-all solution. This can allow for more diversity in design without sacrificing

design intent. The downside of this type of guideline is that it can be difficult to apply consistently due to its subjective nature. It also relies on the expertise of the review body, which can vary. This type of guideline also requires more time for review and results in an extended project timeline.

## Boise's Design Guidelines Approach Today

Today, while Boise's design guidelines are a hybrid of all three approaches, the majority of the guidelines are performance-based. Performance-based guidelines are especially prevalent on the topics of building articulation and massing, which is where most of the case studies with a poor design reputation fall short.

## Recommended Approach for Background Building Design Review

Background buildings and landmark buildings should have distinctive approaches.

Background buildings would benefit from reducing the number of standards that are performance-based and incorporating more form-based standards. This shift can help to more clearly articulate a desired outcome.

This recommendation relates back to stakeholder feedback that new building designs are often cluttered and lacking design cohesion. Performance-based guidelines can engender a design approach based on a menu of options and do not tend to produce design cohesion.

In light of the Modern Zoning Code's expanded scope that now covers some topics from the design guidelines, the design guidelines can reduce their focus to elements that reinforce the design principles from Section 1.4 of this memo.

**Recommended Approach for Landmark Building Design Review**

Guidelines for landmark buildings should be weighted towards negotiated design guidelines. This is an opportunity for the City to establish aspirational principles for landmark buildings, which the Design Review Commission is then tasked to interpret and apply to landmark building applications. This has the benefit of granting a higher degree of creative license in landmark building design—hopefully producing exemplary, one-of-a-kind designs that the design guidelines could not necessarily anticipate—while ensuring that the design meets the goals of design excellence in Boise.

**Design Review Process**

The Major Design Review process is established in the Modern Zoning Code and currently sends applications to the Design Review Commission (DRC) as the final step in the review process, barring an appeal to City Council (MZC Section 11-05-05.3). Unfortunately, this process involves the DRC too late in the process to effectively influence applications under the design guidelines. By the time applications reach the DRC, applicants have already "fully baked" their designs and obtained interdepartmental and planning approval. Based on the sunk cost of already developing detailed permit

drawings, applicants are resistant to major influence.

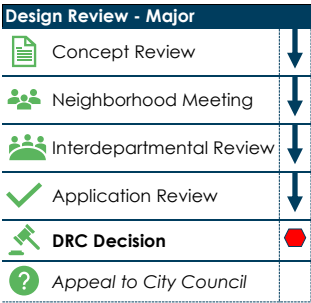
The Design Review Commission should complete their review earlier in the design review process. Below are process recommendations.

**Design Review Commission Earlier**

The design review process should include the DRC decision either before or after Neighborhood Meetings, and before interdepartmental and application review. This early DRC involvement could occur at the time of Concept Review. This change would allow the DRC to review applications before the design is too developed and put the DRC in a better position to influence design. Interdepartmental and application review are staff reviews that require fully-baked permit sets and are more technical in nature. With DRC approval, applicants could confidently invest in design drawings for this technical review knowing that their ideas are aligned with the design guidelines.

**Additional Review for Landmark Buildings**

Landmark buildings merit an additional touchpoint with the DRC. For landmark building applications, the DRC should participate in a preliminary meeting with the applicant, such as a pre-app meeting, to ensure that the intent of the design guidelines is reflected during the concept design phase.



Above: Graphic of the design review process outlined in the Modern Zoning Code. The DRC decision point occurs at the end of the process, limiting the commission's leverage to influence design.

## 3.2 Zooming In: Recommendations for Select Guidelines

**Now let's zoom into recommendations for specific design guidelines based on our findings in Chapter 2. These are grouped into recommendations to move or remove, to change, or to add content to the existing design guidelines.**

### Move or Remove

**Move or remove guidelines on topics that are more effectively addressed through different means. Some of these topics may already be addressed sufficiently by the Modern Zoning Code.**

- Move or remove guidelines on sustainable design. Use another mechanism to achieve sustainable design. (*Downtown and Citywide Design Guideline 1.2*)
- Remove guidelines on parking placement and rely on the Modern Zoning Code. (*Downtown Design Guideline 3.3 and Citywide Design Guideline 3.4*)
- Remove guidelines on drive-through uses and rely on the Modern Zoning Code. (*Downtown Design Guideline 3.3 and Citywide Design Guideline 3.4*)
- Move criteria for what counts towards meeting multi-family open space. This can be more effectively regulated in the Modern Zoning Code. (*Downtown Design Guideline 3.4 and Citywide Design Guideline 3.5*)
- Move building placement component of guidelines. This can be more effectively regulated in the Modern Zoning Code. (*Downtown Design Guideline 3.5 and Citywide Design Guideline 3.6*)

- Consider removing standards in Building Lighting that may be covered elsewhere in City standards. (*Downtown and Citywide Design Guideline 4.5*)

### Remove requirements for pedestrian-oriented open space on small parcels.

- Remove requirements for pedestrian-oriented space (not clear whether pedestrian-oriented space on private parcels would be usable). (*Downtown Design Guideline 3.5 and Citywide Design Guideline 3.6*)

### Remove design guidelines that emphasize distinctiveness over simplicity.

- Remove emphasis on "distinctiveness". (*Downtown and Citywide Design Guideline 4.1*)
- Remove photo examples of "original and distinctive design". (*Downtown and Citywide Design Guideline 4.5*)

### Remove vague language.

- Remove vague language around departures from building elements and details guidelines. (*Downtown and Citywide Design Guideline 4.3*)

### Add

- Include standards for large multi-block sites. (*Downtown Design Guideline 3.2 and Citywide Design Guideline 3.3*)



- Expand applicability of building frontage guidelines to facades fronting public open spaces. (*Downtown and Citywide Design Guideline 2.2*)
- Add additional massing allowances, like taller corner elements, that could help distinguish gateways at locations envisioned in 3.5/3.6. (*Downtown Design Guideline 3.5 and Citywide Design Guideline 3.6*)
- Address material origin to meet intent for local materials. (*Downtown and Citywide Design Guideline 4.4*)
- Add standard in that blank walls, treated or otherwise, cannot appear on street-facing facades in priority environments or with certain frontage types. (*Downtown and Citywide Design Guideline 4.6*)

## Change

### Reduce opportunities to depart from parking garage and screening guidelines.

- Reduce or eliminate opportunities for departures from parking garage frontage and screening standards. (*Downtown and Citywide Design Guideline 2.2*)

### Combine guidelines that overlap.

- Combine some components of guidelines with frontage standards, including the dimensional standards from Non-Motorized Circulation/Connections (especially relating to widths of landscaping and sidewalks), structured parking standards, and guidelines for pedestrian-oriented space. (*Downtown Design Guidelines 3.1, 3.3, 3.4; Citywide Design Guideline 3.2, 3.4, 3.5*)
- Combine some of the standards from Non-Motorized Circulation/Connections with expanded guidance for multi-block redevelopment to create a development pattern that promotes walkability.

(*Downtown Design Guideline 3.1 and Citywide Design Guideline 3.2*)

### Change some guidelines that are "encouraged" to be required, or remove them.

- Change components in Internal Open Space/Design that are "encouraged" to be required, or remove them. (*Downtown Design Guideline 3.4 and Citywide Design Guideline 3.5*)
- Change components in Building Lighting that are "encouraged" to be required, or remove them. (*Downtown and Citywide Design Guideline 4.5*)

### Calibrate guidelines to respond to appropriate scale and context.

- Calibrate scale of required open space to be large enough to provide a meaningful civic space or park space on large projects. Remove requirements for open space on smaller parcel in infill contexts. (*Downtown Design Guideline 3.4 and Citywide Design Guideline 3.5*)
- Concentrate guidelines in Landscaping Design to focus on situations where screening is appropriate. (*Citywide Design Guideline 3.8*)
- Calibrate tripartite facade articulation to account for architectural style and the scale of the building. (*Downtown and Citywide Design Guideline 4.1*)
- Change building massing and articulation standards so they better address context-sensitive scale transitions between different environments or differently-scaled buildings. (*Downtown and Citywide Design Guideline 4.2*)

### Change standards to promote simple, high quality, and cohesive design.

- Change Building Massing and Articulation standards so they don't encourage a design approach to large buildings that results in buildings that appear "cluttered". (*Downtown and Citywide Design Guideline 4.2*)

- Change Building Elements and Details standards to better promote cohesive building details. (*Downtown and Citywide Design Guideline 4.3*)
- Change prioritization of material choice on ground floor to high quality materials everywhere to avoid negative impacts on overall building durability. (*Downtown and Citywide Design Guideline 4.4*)
- Refine guidance on material detailing, particularly with respect to less durable materials. (*Downtown and Citywide Design Guideline 4.4*)

**Change screening standards to promote good street frontage.**

- Reduce or eliminate reliance on screening of structured parking and emphasize standards related to parking placement with respect to street frontage. (*Downtown and Citywide Design Guideline 2.2*)
- Change standards for structured parking specifying tighter limitations on either width allowed or consecutive stories allowed. (*Downtown Design Guideline 3.3 and Citywide Design Guideline 3.4*)

## 3.3 Recommendations Summary

The table below summarizes the recommendations presented in this chapter.

Table 3A - Big-Picture Recommendations			
Rec. #	Recommendation		
1	Focus guidelines for original and distinctive design on landmark buildings and adjust guidelines for background buildings to focus on simple and context-reinforcing design		
2	Create guidelines to address compatibility issues for neighborhood infill projects anticipated under the Modern Zoning Code		
3	Reduce performance-based standards, increase form-based standards, and apply negotiated standards to civic buildings		

Table 3B - "Move or Remove" Recommendations			
Guideline(s) Addressed			
Rec. #	Downtown	Citywide	Recommendation
4	1.2	N/A	Move or remove guidelines on sustainable design.
5	3.3	3.4	Remove guidelines on parking placement and rely on MZC.
6	3.3	3.4	Remove guidelines on drive-through uses and rely on MZC.
7	3.4	3.5	Move criteria for what counts towards meeting multi-family open space to MZC.
8	3.5	3.6	Remove guidelines on building placement and rely on MZC.
9	4.5	4.5	Move building lighting guidelines.
10	3.5	3.6	Remove requirements for pedestrian-oriented space.
11	4.1	4.1	Remove emphasis on "distinctiveness".
12	4.5	4.5	Remove photo examples of "original and distinctive design".
13	4.3	4.3	Remove vague language around departures from building elements and details guidelines.

Table 3C - "Add" Recommendations			
Guideline(s) Addressed			
Rec. #	Downtown	Citywide	Recommendation
14	3.2	3.3	Add standards for large multi-block sites.
15	2.2	2.2	Expand applicability of building frontage guidelines to facades fronting public open spaces.
16	3.5	3.6	Add additional massing allowances, like taller corner elements, to help distinguish gateways.
17	4.4	4.4	Address material origin to meet intent for local materials.
18	4.6	4.6	Add standard that blank walls cannot appear on street-facing facades in priority environments.

Table 3D - "Change" Recommendations			
Guideline(s) Addressed			
Rec. #	Downtown	Citywide	Recommendation
19	2.2	2.2	Reduce or eliminate opportunities for departures from parking garage frontage and screening standards.
20	3.1, 3.3, 3.4	3.2, 3.4, 3.5	Integrate or coordinate various guidelines with frontage standards: Non-Motorized Circulation/Connections, structured parking, and pedestrian-oriented space.
21	3.1	3.2	Combine some standards from Non-Motorized Circulation/Connections with expanded guidance for multi-block redevelopment.
22	3.4	3.5	Change components in Internal Open Space/Design that are "encouraged" to be required, or remove them.
23	4.5	4.5	Change components in Building Lighting that are "encouraged" to be required, or remove them.
24	3.4	3.5	Change scale of required open space and remove requirement on small infill parcels
25	N/A	3.8	Concentrate guidelines in Landscaping Design to focus on situations where screening is appropriate.
26	4.1	4.1	Calibrate tripartite facade articulation to account for architectural style and the scale of the building.
27	4.2	4.2	Change building massing and articulation standards to better address context-sensitive scale transitions
28	4.2	4.2	Change Building Massing and Articulation standards so they don't encourage a design approach to large buildings that results in buildings that appear "cluttered".
29	4.3	4.3	Change Building Elements and Details standards to better promote cohesive building details.
30	4.4	4.4	Change prioritization of material choice on ground floor to high quality materials throughout the building to avoid negative impacts on overall building durability.
31	4.4	4.4	Refine guidance on material detailing, particularly with respect to less durable materials.
32	2.2	2.2	Reduce or eliminate reliance on screening of structured parking and emphasize standards related to parking placement with respect to street frontage
33	3.3	3.4	Change guidelines for structured parking to more tightly limit width or number of stories on facades.



## 3.4 Implementation

**As a next step, the recommendations in this memo need to be implemented through a Design Guidelines Update.**

### The Need for a Design Guidelines Update

Now that the Modern Zoning Code has been adopted, Boise should seize the moment to initiate a comprehensive update of its Citywide and Downtown Design Guidelines. As demonstrated in the recommendations, there are opportunities to remove redundancies and inconsistencies between the Modern Zoning Code and Design Guidelines. Since the previous zoning code lacked detailed guidance on a variety of important topics such as parking placement, the Design Guidelines filled that gap by providing direction through design review. Some of these topics are now addressed in the Modern Zoning Code, removing the need to cover them through the design review process.

### Steps in a Design Guidelines Update

First, the design guidelines update process should begin by comparing overlapping topics between the Modern Zoning Code and the Design Guidelines and eliminating redundancy and inconsistency.

Second, the update process should implement the recommendations of this memo, beginning with the big-picture topics presented in Section 3.1 which may result in restructuring and/or a different guideline approach, and following up with the guideline-specific recommendations that are still applicable to topics in the restructured guidelines.

### Stakeholder Engagement and Rollout

Consider a "user testing" phase that would harness the expertise of the design and development community (such as local chapters of ULI and AIA) to test and refine the guidelines. Other communities have found this to be a productive step in a design guidelines update process. The City of Memphis, for example, convened designers and developers to test sections of their new design guidelines for effectiveness before finalizing their design guidelines update.

Throughout the update process and upon release of the new guidelines, engage in periodic educational outreach with the design and development community to keep them informed of design guidelines changes.

