

BOSTON CITYWIDE DESIGN GUIDELINES

DRAFT JUNE 2025



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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NOTE ON THE DRAFT

This document is a draft version of the Boston Citywide Design Guidelines. Content, images, citations, and references are subject to change. A finalized version will be released following additional review and public feedback.

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INTRODUCTION

Boston is growing. Between 2010 and 2020, the city’s population grew by 9.4%, and in 2023, Mayor Michelle Wu set a goal to return to the city’s peak population of 800,000 residents. In the coming years, comprehensive planning and rezoning efforts will create dozens of new buildings and many thousands of square feet of development across the city.

Boston’s rich cultural history is expressed through its urban design. The diversity of its streetscape—featuring historic buildings next to modern skyscrapers, a street layout informed by infilled swampland and colonial parcel lines, and neighborhoods that bare scars of gentrification and urban renewal and have since been reclaimed by their communities—reflects the diversity and experiences of its citizens. While this diversity is to be celebrated, it can also be difficult to write a one-size-fits-all approach to designing in Boston. Each neighborhood, block, and parcel has its own historic, cultural, and demographic context. An architectural detail or landscape plan that is perfect for one site may be inappropriate on another. No two sites are the same.

Instead, as Boston grows and new projects are built to meet the demands of a growing population and economy, designers must look to design principles and performance standards to guide growth, rather than adherence to any one style. Growth paired with good design is centered on people. Growth without design deteriorates Boston’s sense of place. The function of a site—how it fits in with its neighbors, how people move through it and past it, how people use it—is critical. Above all else, design in Boston must meet the needs of the people who live, work, and play here today and the people who will live, work, and play here tomorrow.

This document is a handbook for creating high-quality design that meets those needs. It is intended to inspire, empower, and guide developers, designers, community leaders, planners, and anyone who is interested in shaping their city to create spaces that are not just aesthetically pleasing, but also functional, sustainable, and inclusive.

The guidelines that follow build on the principles of the City of Boston’s Design Vision, which are:

- **Design from Understanding:** Good design uses engagement and observation to reflect an understanding of people and place.
- **Design for the Future:** The things we build today should be sustainable, resilient, and adaptive, so that they will last for generations to come.
- **Design Beyond the Boundary:** Every new building and every open space has an impact on the city far beyond their own parcel line.
- **Design the Details:** Good design centers the everyday experience of people and communities, and expresses those experiences at all scales.

This is a living document. As the needs of Boston change over time, these Standards and Guidelines may be updated to respond to new typologies, advancements in building technology, and city planning initiatives. Projects that follow these guidelines will contribute to a Boston that is responsive to the present and resilient toward future challenges.

DESIGN REVIEW PROCESS

Projects will undergo different types and degrees of review by the Planning Department as well as other City agencies to examine their site plan, massing, and design depending on project scale, location, or project type, such as a change of use, new construction, or addition. Project conditions trigger different types of design-related review by different review bodies and processes, including but not limited to:

Zoning Board of Appeal (ZBA)

- If a project requires zoning relief, the project must file an appeal with the Zoning Board of Appeal (ZBA).
- During the appeals process, Planning Department staff create non-binding recommendations on ZBA applications that consider zoning and planning context. These recommendations are then provided to the ZBA for their consideration.
 - The ZBA may require Planning Department design review as a condition of zoning relief.

Article 80 Development Review

The scale or type of project (as determined by the Boston Zoning Code) often triggers Planning Department design review as a component of Article 80 development review:

- The design components of the review process enforce Planning Department Design Guidelines.
- Depending on the size of the project (refer to the Boston Zoning Code) other components of the review process include, but are not limited to: the evaluation of transportation impacts, accessibility, resilience and green building, infrastructure systems, and development impacts.

Boston Landmarks Commission (BLC)

Changes to a Boston-landmarked building requires the prior review and approval of the Boston Landmarks Commission (BLC):

- BLC staff should be consulted early in the design process to assist in the development of projects that will be approved by the BLC by assessing the potential impact on historic structures, refining and improving proposed changes, and ensuring that changes align with landmarks’ standards.

- The BLC ultimately approves projects through a public hearing process.
- BLC resources provide the latest information on pending and designated Boston landmarks.

Article 85 Demolition Delay

The demolition of buildings that meet the criteria outlined in Article 85 requires an Article 85 Demolition Delay application that is reviewed by BLC staff:

- Boston Zoning Code Article 85 establishes a waiting period to consider alternatives to the demolition of a building of historical, architectural, cultural or urban design value to the City, including how that may impact project design.
- Depending on the significance of the building, demolition delay provides an opportunity for the public to comment on the demolition of a particular building.
- Minimizes the number and extent of building demolition where no immediate re-use of the site is planned.
- Refer to Boston Zoning Code Article 85 for requirements and review process.

Coastal Flood Resilience Overlay District (CFROD)

Projects in the Coastal Flood Resilience Overlay District (CFROD) require resilience review through the Article 80 review process.

- CFROD ensures project compliance with the City’s climate resilience policies, requirements, and Coastal Flood Resilience Design Guidelines, ensuring projects are designed to be resilient to the risks of future floods under sea level rise
- Refer to Boston Zoning Code Article 25A for requirements and review process.

Groundwater Conservation Overlay District (GCOD)

Projects in the Groundwater Conservation Overlay District (GCOD) must obtain a Conditional Use Permit through the Boston Zoning Board of Appeals depending on the scale and nature of the project as outlined in Article 32 of the Boston Zoning Code.

- GCOD helps protect wood pile foundations of buildings from being damaged by lowered groundwater levels.
- Projects must include a groundwater recharge system and obtain a Certification of No Harm.
- Refer to the Boston Zoning Code Article 32 for requirements and review process.

HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

This document describes expectations for Planning Department Design Review. All development projects subject to Planning Department Design Review are expected to review and demonstrate response to the relevant items. Projects that are not subject to Planning Department Design Review are strongly encouraged to follow these guidelines.

Each topic covered by this document may be divided into two sections: the Design Intent and Design Guidelines.

- Design Intent describes the “what” and “why” of a given topic: What is the guiding principle behind this topic? Why is this important? What benefits will following the guidelines and standards bring?
- Guidelines are qualitative statements about best practices for design and city priorities. While exact implementation may vary from project to project, all projects are expected to acknowledge and implement the applicable design guidelines and demonstrate how individual design solutions comply.

The guidelines contained herein complement other place-specific or topic-specific guidelines.

Planning Department Recent Guidelines

- Coastal Flood Resilience Design Guidelines (2019)
- Avenue of the Arts Design Guidelines Study (2015)
- Brighton/Guest Street Planning Study & Urban Design Guidelines (2012)
- Design Guidelines – Charlestown Historic Monument Area Boston Naval Shipyard at Charlestown (1978)
- Greenway District Planning Study Use and Development Guidelines (2010)
- Harrison-Albany Corridor Strategy Plan (2012)
- PLAN: Charlestown (2023)
- PLAN: Downtown (2023)
- PLAN: East Boston (2024)
- PLAN: JP/ROX (2017)
- PLAN: Mattapan (2023)
- PLAN: Nubian Square (2019)
- PLAN: South Boston Dorchester Avenue (2016, with transportation updates in 2021)
- Roxbury Strategic Master Plan (2004)
- Western Avenue Corridor Study (2022)
- Roslindale Square Small Area Plan (2024)
- Cleary Square Small Area Plan (forthcoming, 2025)

Additional Plans and Policies from other City Departments and Regulatory Bodies

Mayor’s Office of Housing

- MOH Policies, including Design Standards and Design Review Checklist

Streets Cabinet

- Bike Parking Guidelines (2021)
- Curb Management
- Recharge Boston
- Tactical Public Realm Design Guidelines
- Bicycle Level of Traffic (LTS) Stress
- BTD Standards and Guidelines
- PWD Design Standards and Guidelines
- Climate Resilience Design Guidelines
- Boston Complete Streets
- Office of Green Infrastructure: Green Infrastructure Planning and Design Resources

Office of Historic Preservation

- Boston Landmarks Commission

Disabilities Commission

Curb Ramp Design Guidelines

Boston Water and Sewer Commission

- Boston Green Infrastructure Planning and Design Handbook

Boston Parks and Recreation

- Parks Ordinance
 - 7.4-10 Restrictions on Park Frontages (Parkway Height Ordinance)
 - 7.4-11 Permission for Construction Near Parks or Parkways (100’ Rule)
 - 7.4-12 Setback Requirements
 - 7.4-13 Further Setback Requirements
- Green Stormwater Infrastructure Design and Implementation Guide
- Urban Forest Plan and the related Neighborhood Strategies Plan
- 7-4.7 Establishing Protections for the City Tree Canopy
- MGL Chapter 87 Shade Trees
- Ordinance establishing Protections for the City of Boston Tree Canopy
- Open Space and Recreation Plan

Boston Environment

- Climate Ready Boston
- Heat Resilience Solutions for Boston

Boston Conservation Commission

- Boston Wetlands Ordinance

PLANNING VIBRANT SITES

Planning Vibrant Sites is focused on site design—what happens on the ground and in the space between buildings. Successful site designs create building edges, open spaces, and community connections that provide accessible space for all, are resilient in the face of climate change, and enable a vibrant and diverse community identity.

RESPONSE TO CONTEXT

INTENT

All new development projects should enhance existing neighborhoods. Site designs should reflect an understanding of existing site conditions, connections, important adjacencies, and the scale and texture of the surrounding fabric.

GUIDELINES

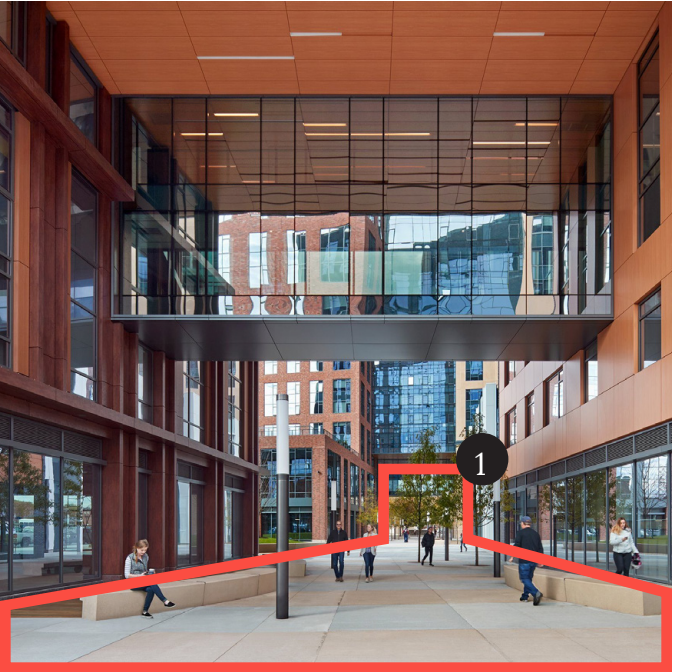
- 1 Wherever possible, provide connections to existing pedestrian paths and desire lines.
- 2 Identify major points of interest and access such as MBTA stops, bike paths, open space connections, etc. when laying out your site and situate building and site entries to respond to or enhance them and face the adjacent right-of-way.
- 3 Align new blocks and internal circulation with the existing street grid, where appropriate.
- 4 Enhance identifiable focal points in the surrounding area or neighborhood. Identify existing view corridors and sight lines and organize the site plan to accommodate them.
- 5 Celebrate and respond to nearby cultural and natural assets. Research community gathering events such as festivals, cultural celebrations, and more, and design open spaces to interact with and enable these events.
- 6 Coordinate on site project elements with those existing in the adjacent public right-of-ways, including street trees, utilities, street furnishings, and accessible accommodations at curb transitions.



The Laneway outdoor space



Northeastern campus connection



Through block at 345 Harrison



Downtown Crossing



Through-path in Jamaica Plain

PEDESTRIAN & BICYCLE ACCESS

INTENT

Pedestrian- and bicycle-centered design promotes healthier lifestyles, fosters a vibrant community, and reduces vehicular congestion. On all sites, pedestrian safety and access should be prioritized over vehicle access.

GUIDELINES

- 1 The design of sidewalks and curb ramps must comply with the requirements of 521 CMR 22.00, which governs accessibility requirements for sidewalks and other pedestrian walkways, and should comply with Boston Complete Streets Design Guidelines and minimum standards. The Public Improvement Commission must approve all changes impacting recorded rights-of-way.
- 2 Sidewalks should meet the minimum dimension, and are encouraged to meet the preferred dimensions articulated by Boston Complete Streets whenever possible, but in particular with new building construction. New sidewalks should also meet the design standards of the Public Works Department.
- 3 Sidewalk grade must meet the requirements of 521 CMR 22.3 Walkways. Sidewalks with running slopes greater than one-in-20 (1:20) (5%) will be considered a ramp, and must comply with 521 CMR 24 RAMPS, except where the slope of the natural topography exceeds one-in-20 (1:20) (5%), a ramp is not required.

- 4 The location of sidewalk curb ramps must meet the requirements of 521 CMR 21.0 Curb Cuts, which required curb ramps at each corner of each intersection, located within the crosswalk and/or the pedestrian path of travel. See Boston Complete Streets Design Guidelines, pages 160-161, and the Public Works Design Standards for additional information regarding curb ramp design criteria and considerations.
- 5 Sidewalks located in the Coastal Flood Resilient Overlay District should also comply with the Climate Resilient Design Standards and Guidelines.
- 6 Paving materials for sidewalks should be high-quality, durable, and easy to maintain. For paving material selection for the sidewalk, see Boston Complete Streets Guidelines and Public Works Design Standards (please note: since Complete Streets was authored in 2013, additional materials have been accepted as City standard). Non-standard material assemblies may be installed through seeking a License, Maintenance, and Indemnification Agreement (LMI) through the Public Improvement Commission.
- 7 Provide a direct, accessible path to the primary entrance of any building that is easily identifiable from the street. If the primary entrance does not face the front lot line, provide visual clues that direct one to the main entrance.



401 Park open space and paths



Maverick St, East Boston



Wide sidewalks at 100 Federal street

- 8 Include signage, and other wayfinding elements to ensure that publicly accessible connections are safe, visible, and can be identified by the public.
- 9 Provide lighting along pedestrian routes and at building entrances that makes users feel safe and welcome.
- 10 Do not locate entrances behind parking or vehicular circulation.
- 11 Separate pedestrian travel paths from driveways and vehicle access. When separate paths are not possible due to space constraints, identify a clear and accessible pedestrian path within the driveway.
- 12 Incorporate pedestrian-scale amenities and emphasize connections to encourage walkability.
- 13 Design paths and connections for ease of access by users of all ages and abilities. When long travel paths are required, utilize seating and benches to provide opportunities for rest.
- 14 All bicycle parking and access should be designed according to the City of Boston’s Bike Parking Guidelines and Boston Zoning Code.

- 15 Bike parking in the public right-of-way serves short-term users. When such parking is provided, its location and configuration should comply with the Bike Parking Guidelines. The City of Boston’s standard rack is a black, powder-coated post-and-ring rack (also called hitch rack) with an in-ground mounting mechanism. They are the only racks approved for installation on city sidewalks, plazas, and other locations in the public right-of-way. Each post-and-ring rack provides two bike parking spaces. They may be installed in a series to create parking areas of variable quantities.
- 16 Bikeshare is a important part of Boston’s public transportation system. Bikeshare stations are typically located in the public right-of-way furnishing zones and may be located in publicly-accessible open spaces when space is limited. New bikeshare stations should comply with the Bike Parking Guidelines. The location and configuration of bikeshare stations located in public rights-of-way must be approved by the Public Improvement Commission. Stations should be located off-street in street furnishing zones, often in the public right-of-way. If located on private property, they must be visible from the public right-of-way. They should have adequate night-time lighting and, for solar charging, a few hours of direct sunlight every day. They also need to be publicly accessible at all times and relatively easy to service for bike rebalancing and general maintenance.



Open space at Flat 9 at Whittier



Wayfinding and multimodal road near Flat 9 at Whittier



Accessible ramps and plaza at Nubian Square station

ROADWAYS, PARKING & VEHICULAR ACCESS

INTENT

Roadways refer to the portion of the public right-of-way between the curb lines, including bike lanes, bus lanes, general-purpose travel lanes, on-street parking, drainage systems, and other curbside uses. While sustainable modes of transportation (such as walking, biking, or mass transit) are preferred, garages and vehicular access may be necessary in some contexts. The location and design of all vehicular access points on a site should prioritize the safety of pedestrians and all road users.

GUIDELINES

- 1 The design of roadways should comply with Boston Complete Streets Guidelines. Roadways located in the Coastal Flood Resilient Overlay District should also comply with the Climate Resilient Design Standards and Guidelines. Development Review and Planning staff will identify the relevant street type or types in the case of corner or through-block conditions for the purposes of project review. All new ROWs and changes to existing public rights-of-way must be approved by the Public Improvement Commission.
- 2 All new curb cuts must demonstrate compliance with the City of Boston’s Complete Streets.
- a New driveways must accommodate a continuous and level pedestrian path of travel across the vehicular path; refer to Public Works Department Standard Details.

- 2 Close unused curb cuts whenever possible.
- 3 Porte cocheres and semi-circle pick-ups/drop-offs are strongly discouraged.
- 4 Plan driveway layouts to avoid existing mature on site or street trees. Provide a buffer of 5 feet from the new driveway to the edge of the street tree pit.
- 5 Visible on-site parking, whether surface parking, tuck-under, or structured, should be screened and buffered from public viewpoints. See Active Edges and Screening and Buffering sections.
- 6 New roadways should be laid out through the Public Improvement Commission as public highway easements.
- 7 Portions of the site that are dedicated to vehicle maneuvering are not considered open space. Refer to definitions in the Boston Zoning Code.



Harborwalk Residences raised site and roadway flood mitigation



Bartlett Station Apartments parking layout

BUILDING PLACEMENT & ORIENTATION

INTENT

Thoughtful placement and orientation of a building on a site can harness solar benefits, maximize sun-light access, and contribute to vibrant and livable streetscapes.

GUIDELINES

- 1 Establish a hierarchy of primary and secondary site edges. Where buildings front two public ways at a corner, both sides may be considered primary.
- 2 Buildings should be sited along lot edges that face the public realm, unless otherwise restricted by applicable zoning setbacks and maximum building width.
- 3 Where the existing context maintains a consistent and prominent streetwall, locate the building massing to continue that condition as closely as possible. Thoughtfully placed and well designed open spaces may be utilized to interrupt the rigor of the street wall where appropriate.
- 4 Consider modal setbacks when positioning buildings on the site.



Active edges along Hilton Garden



Cleary square



Shops along Fenway



Consistent streetwall along Roxbury Crossing

SETBACKS & SEPARATION

INTENT

Setbacks help shape the building’s relationship with the street. The open spaces created by setbacks and through-block connections can play a vital role in creating community open space and room for light and air.

GUIDELINES

- 1 Scale setback dimensions appropriately according to their intended use, their adjacency to the public realm, and the use of adjacent interior spaces.
- 2 Front setbacks, where required, should prioritize shared public programming, public realm improvements such as dedicating space for the sidewalk, and informal or unprogrammed space for gathering or lingering.
- 3 In the case of residential development, front setbacks should be utilized to help buffer units from the public way.
- 4 Side and rear setbacks, where required and appropriate, should prioritize greenery and a mix of active and passive programming for project users. Surface asphalt is discouraged.
- 5 When a mixed-use building abuts a residential zoning district (1F, 2F, 3F), the building should be set back an appropriate distance relative to the predominant scale of the adjacent structures.
- 6 Pedestrian through-block connections should leave a significant portion of their length open to the sky. The bottom of built elements overhanging through-block connections (balconies, bridges, canopies, etc.) must be at least 10 feet above grade.

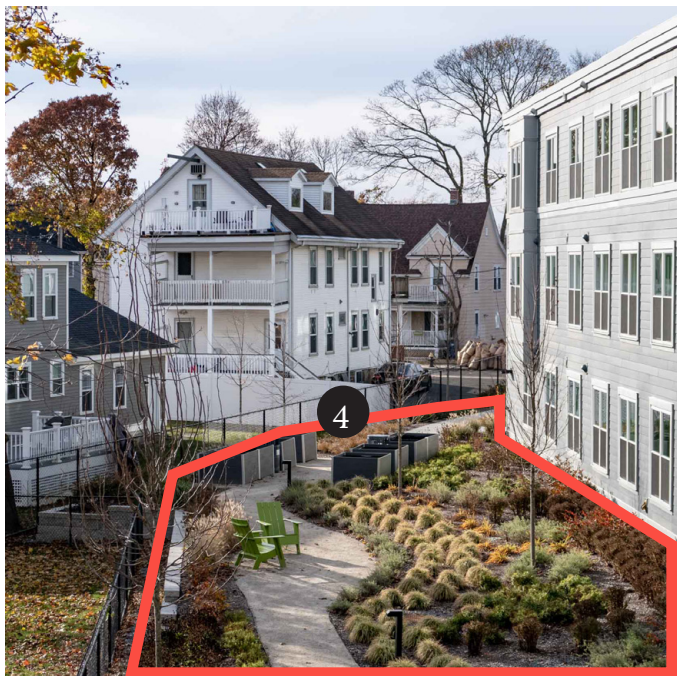


Large setback along JJ Carroll Redevelopment

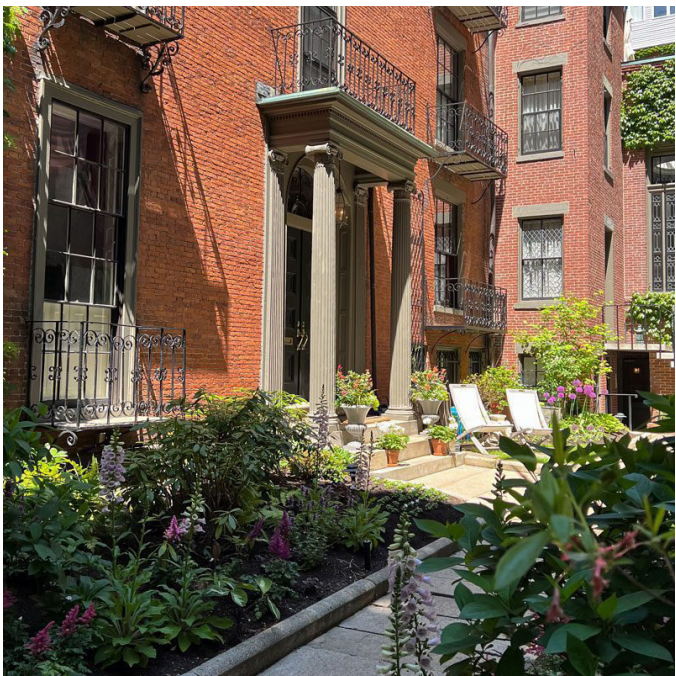
- 7 Create a buffer of open space between the building and sensitive ecological sites, such as wetlands.



Planting within front yards along Hyde Park avenue



Garden path in West Roxbury



Beacon Hill

SCREENING & ENCLOSURE

INTENT

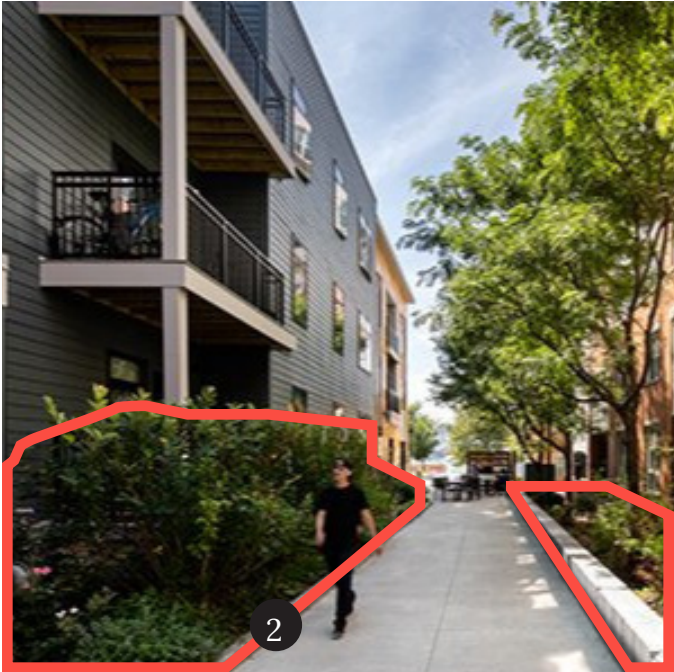
Fencing, walls, hedges, lines of trees, and other landscaping and site elements can define the street edge and the perimeter of the site. These elements can also provide privacy and separation from vehicular traffic.

GUIDELINES

1 Do not locate utility systems, transformers, and mechanical elements in the front yard of a site. Planning’s recommendation in the order of preference: 1. location inside the building or an accessory structure; 2. location in a subsurface vault within a driveway or other area where pavement is necessary; 3. above-grade location interior to the site but closely adjacent to the public right-of-way. Planning recommends that above-grade locations within the site be located to minimize visual impact and maximize contiguous open space as well as be buffered using vegetative screening or fencing.

2 Screening and buffering should be deployed where visual and physical separation is required or warranted to establish privacy, define boundaries between divergent uses, limit exposure of tenants and neighbors to conditions such as driveways, parking, trash, mechanical equipment, loading, and provide sound attenuation for active site edges. Screening and buffering can be deployed both at the site’s perimeter and within a site depending upon the intended function. Refer to the applicable neighborhood zoning code articles for screening and buffering requirements.

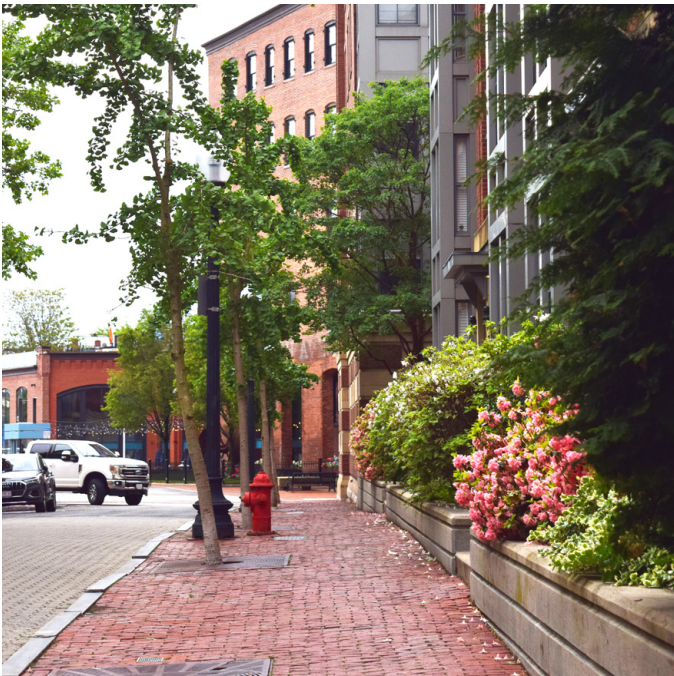
- 3 Locate native planting and landscaping at the site edge to create a planted buffer.
- 4 Material character should take into consideration site and neighborhood context. Height should be sensitive to visual sightlines influencing vehicular and pedestrian safety. Height and opacity are recommended to support interaction between neighbors where appropriate. Refer to the applicable neighborhood zoning code articles for screening and buffering requirements.
- 5 Use high-quality fencing materials, such as wood or metal. Chain link fencing is not encouraged, especially in front yards. If chain-link is used, it should be vinyl-coated chain link in combination with landscaping.
- 6 Where screening and buffering is required or desirable and space allows, consider a planted buffer, appropriately scaled for the location.
- 7 Whenever feasible, include an indoor trash room that is accessible from the exterior and public right-of-way. For smaller-scale projects where this is not possible, provide a secure, screened area for trash disposal that minimizes visual impact from the public right-of-way and is easily accessible from both the building and the right-of-way.



Planting for screening at the Harborwalk Residences, source: xxxx



Plantings along George street in South End



Rollins street in South End

OPEN SPACE PROGRAMMING,
SIZING, & LOCATION

INTENT

Usable on-site open space creates places for people to gather, play, and enjoy light and fresh air. New open space should create a diverse, vibrant environment that complements the surrounding architecture and land uses. Open spaces can serve individual building users, provide spaces to create community within the project, or invite in neighbors to create a space that serves the broader community.

GUIDELINES

- 1 All projects should provide a site plan demonstrating the size, program, and location of all proposed open spaces and site materials, and the size and species of all preserved and proposed plantings.
- 2 Provide diverse programming spread across all open spaces. Passive areas and vegetative paths should be paired with other more active uses that encourage opportunities for community engagement and gathering.
- 3 Vary the size of multiple open spaces to establish a hierarchy of use and program when applicable.
- 4 Arrange and program open space to be shared by as many people and users as possible, and to facilitate sociability and safety among users.
- 5 Where possible, create direct visual connections between interior amenity spaces and outdoor amenity spaces.
- 6 When a project creates publicly accessible open space in a neighborhood with many families and children, include design features that are

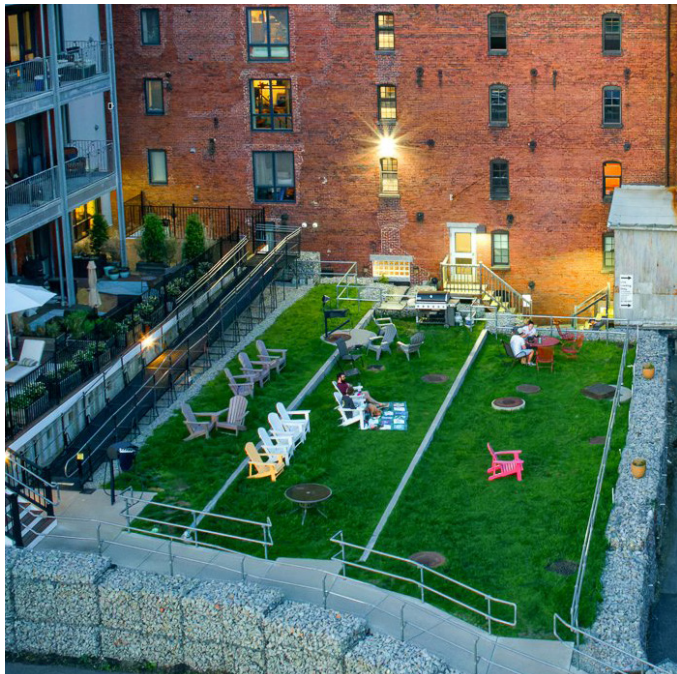
- child-scaled, such as playgrounds, smaller versions of other amenities, and interactive or movable play elements.
- 7 Locate publicly accessible open spaces so that they are visually and physically connected to the public right-of-way, and are fully accessible.
 - 8 Open space amenity placement and orientation should be designed to optimize access to sunlight to extend the seasons of use, wherever possible. Shared open spaces should be made fully accessible to all project users.
 - 9 All open spaces should abide by applicable accessibility codes and standards.



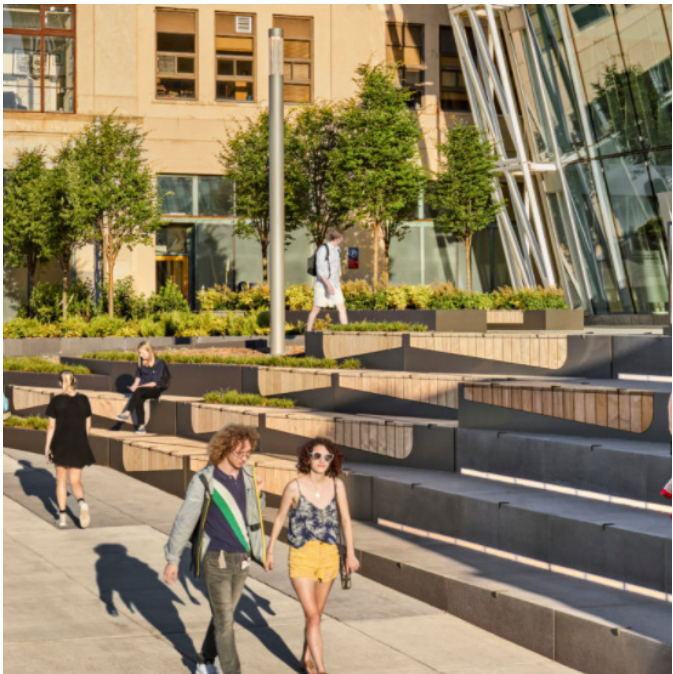
Shoppers Plaza Downtown Crossing



Boston Children's Museum



The Distillery North



Joan & Edgar Booth Theatre

TREES & PLANTING

INTENT

Street trees and on-site mature trees and responsible planting play a vital role in creating a healthy, sustainable, and pleasant environment.

STREET TREE GUIDELINES

- 1 Planning around street trees should reference the Urban Forest Plan, Neighborhood Strategies section guide, and the Boston Parks Department’s Recommended Public Street Tree list. Public shade trees located in the public right-of-way are protected by the provisions of the Boston Public Tree Protection Ordinance, Boston Tree Canopy Ordinance and M.G.L. Chapter 87.
- 2 Design for street trees should comply with Boston Complete Streets Design Guidelines and minimum standards and reference City standard street tree planting details.
- 3 New street tree siting and spacing should meet guidelines set by Boston Complete Streets Design Guidelines. The viability of proposed street tree locations should be confirmed based upon a review of existing subgrade utility constraints and coordinated with proposed utility infrastructure.
- 4 Street tree openings in sidewalks must meet or exceed 24 square feet (3’x8’, 4’x6’, etc.). It is recommended that subsurface conditions be larger than the opening. Refer to minimum tree pit dimensions recommended by the Public Works Department Standard Details.
- 5 Street tree plantings should strive to create a sense of continuity along a street such as through similar tree scale or form. Preserve existing site trees wherever possible and maximize

opportunities to add new trees. Trees located on private property provide the majority of tree cover in Boston, which is an important asset in climate preparedness and resilience strategies. When an existing mature tree must be removed, consider replacing it with a new tree or trees to mitigate the total caliper size of the loss. Proponents are encouraged to engage a certified arborist to survey existing trees on the site, focusing on trees at 6+ inch caliper size, to develop a tree protection strategy to inform development proposals and provide construction-phase services to oversee protection of existing trees identified for preservation on the site.

ON-SITE TREE AND PLANTING GUIDELINES

- 6 Projects should utilize a diverse mix of attractive and well-maintained plantings throughout the site, with plants that are appropriate for Boston’s climate. Refer to the Urban Forest Plan for recommendations for species selection and installation recommendations.
- 7 Prioritize native, drought-tolerant species and pollinating plants.
- 8 Prioritize canopy trees over decorative and ornamental trees, particularly for a street tree condition.
- 9 Use planting to define circulation paths. Avoid creating planted barriers between entrances and the public right-of-way.
- 10 Consider using vegetative roofs planted with native species to help reduce the heat island effect and rainwater runoff.



Flat 9 at Whittier



Columbus Ave, South End



Parcel 12



Plantings at the Dewitt Center

SITE MATERIALS

INTENT

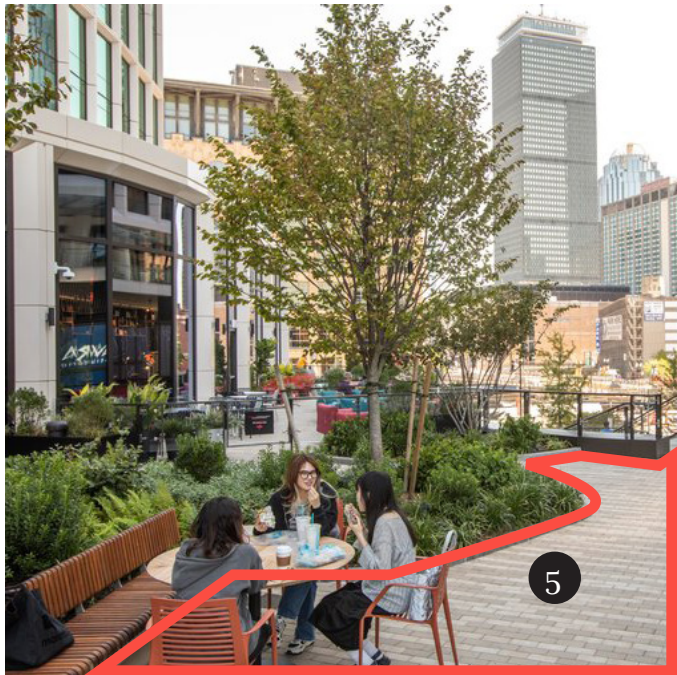
All sites should use high-quality materials for site elements such as pavement, furnishings, walls, or fencing that contribute to the long-lasting character and resilience of a site.

GUIDELINES

- 1 Create a visible transition between the public realm and the primary entrance using elements such as planting, fencing, walls, or other edging.
- 2 Use durable materials that can withstand Boston’s climate, and plan a regular maintenance schedule.
- 3 Study how materials will age and how snow, salt, and ice will weather the material’s visual appearance.
- 4 Avoid materials and finishes that will become slick or slippery when wet.
- 5 Use lighter colored materials on hard surfaces to minimize solar gain and to mitigate the urban heat island effect. Select materials with a higher Solar Reflectance Index (SRI).



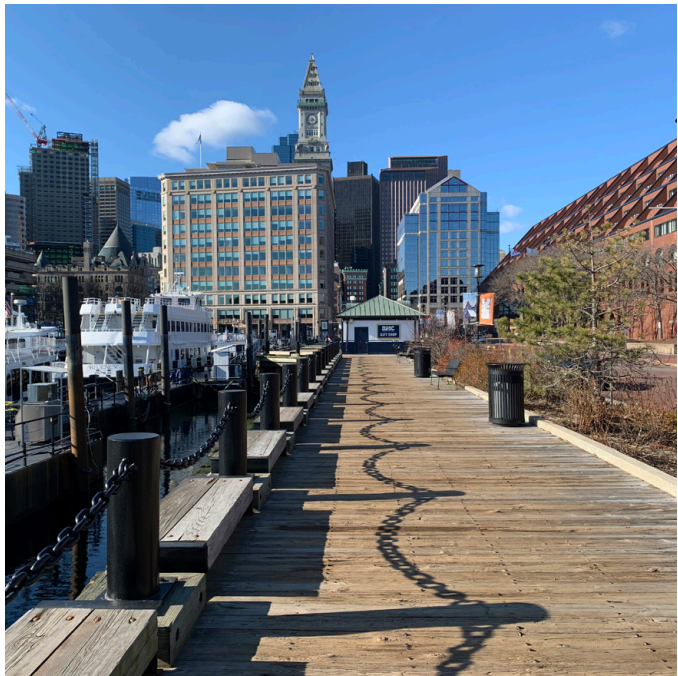
Triple decker in Jamaica Plain



Parcel 12 outdoor space



JJ Carroll Redevelopment



Long Wharf



Overlook Terrace at Orient Heights

COMFORT & RESILIENCE

INTENT

Comfort and safety are of critical importance in site design. Heat, air movement, and sun exposure all affect whether a person is physically and mentally able to use a space. All open spaces should be designed to serve the building users, and to accommodate as many people as possible to feel welcome in a space throughout the year whenever possible.

GUIDELINES

- 1 Use environmental analysis that considers advantageous sun exposure, shadow impacts, and compatibility with adjacent uses to locate open space.
- 2 Minimize negative shadow impacts on both on-site and off-site adjacent open spaces.
- 3 Provide a mix of shaded and unshaded open spaces. Consider how orientation and material choice can create opportunities for passive heating or cooling strategies.
- 4 When a site is adjacent to a highway, train line, or other high-intensity corridor, mitigate noise and pollution effects by using the building as a buffer between the corridor and any on-site open space.
- 5 Buildings can have significant impacts on the direction and intensity of wind flow on a site. Locate and design buildings to minimize environmental impacts at the ground level. Design should eliminate wind flows or wind tunnels, or mitigate wind impacts to the maximum extent possible to enable an active ground-level public realm. For towers, test impacts on the local environment at

the earliest design stage and ensure tall buildings minimize impacts such as wind levels at the street level.

- 6 Reduce the risk of stormwater runoff and flooding by implementing rain gardens and bioswales, and by maximizing permeable area and water collection on the site. The project must manage stormwater to meet the requirements of the Boston Water and Sewer Commission. Planning recommends the incorporation of green infrastructure wherever feasible.
- 7 Permeable area should be maximized to the extent feasible through the incorporation of planting areas and/or green infrastructure. Consider incorporating pervious paving to the extent feasible, allowing for paved areas to function in support of stormwater management in addition to the surfaces’ other uses.



Plantings along the Northeastern EXP building



St. George Rainway



SHAPING RESPONSIVE BUILDINGS

Shaping Responsive Buildings is focused on buildings. The architecture of a building can contribute to the history and culture of the local community through the use of considerate massing, timeless materials, and active ground floor expressions. Buildings that understand their role in the larger context become long-lasting and beloved additions to the city.

RESPONSE TO CONTEXT

INTENT

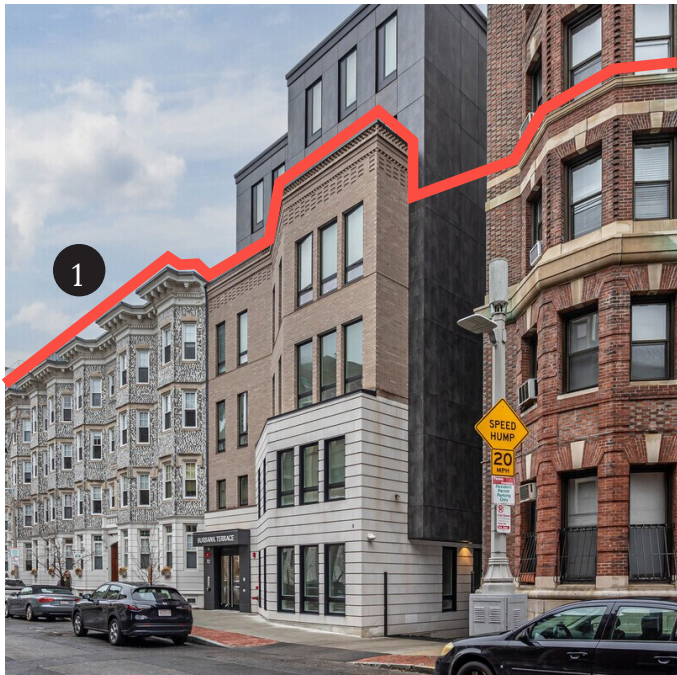
Each of Boston’s neighborhoods has a unique expression that reflects the culture and identity of the people who have lived there over time. The design of new buildings should understand their place in that history, and should be intentional about how they respond to—or break—contextual patterns of design.

GUIDELINES

- 1 Respond to unique attributes of the surrounding neighborhood, such as common details, forms, and architectural patterns. Break these patterns or integrate them into new designs, but acknowledge them in some way.
- 2 Orient the building to maximize internal solar access and to minimize shadow impacts on adjacent open spaces.
- 3 Preserve significant existing on-site amenities, such as mature trees or historically significant structures.
- 4 Compose the building massing to maximize sunlight on open spaces, such as (but not limited to) the Common.
- 5 Use materials that respond to or complement those found on nearby significant buildings. The use of identical materials is not required, but consider tones, textures, and patterns that respond to what exists and help transition from old to new.



Back Bay



Burbank Terrace, Fenway



Multifamily building in Roxbury crossing



East Boston

MODULATION

INTENT

A successful street-level facade creates a vibrant streetscape that is human scaled. Modulating upper-level facades can preserve access to light and air.

GUIDELINES

- 1 Avoid creating long facades that block visual corridors and important visual and pedestrian connections. Where there is an applicable zoning standard, uninterrupted street frontages should be no longer than that standard.
- 2 Avoid facades that read as an overly large single flat plane through the use of material texture and architectural detail.
- 3 Building projections or elements that overhang the sidewalk should be designed to preserve pedestrian comfort and accommodate street trees. The projection or overhang should maintain a minimum vertical clearance of 10’ from the sidewalk and the depth of the overhang should not exceed 2/3 the total width of the sidewalk.
- 4 Projections and changes-of-plane should have a depth that creates a perceptible shadow line.
- 5 Respond to prominent datum lines found on surrounding buildings by either continuing them or by intentionally breaking them.
- 6 Use significant view corridors, heights of surrounding buildings, and street width to determine the size and location of upper-level stepbacks beyond those required by zoning.
- 7 Where occupiable terraces are created by building stepbacks, provide a minimum dimension that enables both accessibility and usability.

- 8 When the rear of a taller building is adjacent to a lower residential zoning district, utilize upper story stepbacks to transition from high to low areas. Refer to City of Boston Zoning Code for any stepback requirements.



South End



One Newcomb Place



Packard Crossing



Bremen street in East Boston

FENESTRATION & FACADE COMPOSITION

INTENT

The design and composition of facades influences the perceived scale and feeling of a building. The building facade may be articulated through the use of multiple materials, architectural trim, window moldings, or other architectural features as appropriate, but all elements should be composed with a clear, coherent, and intentional logic.

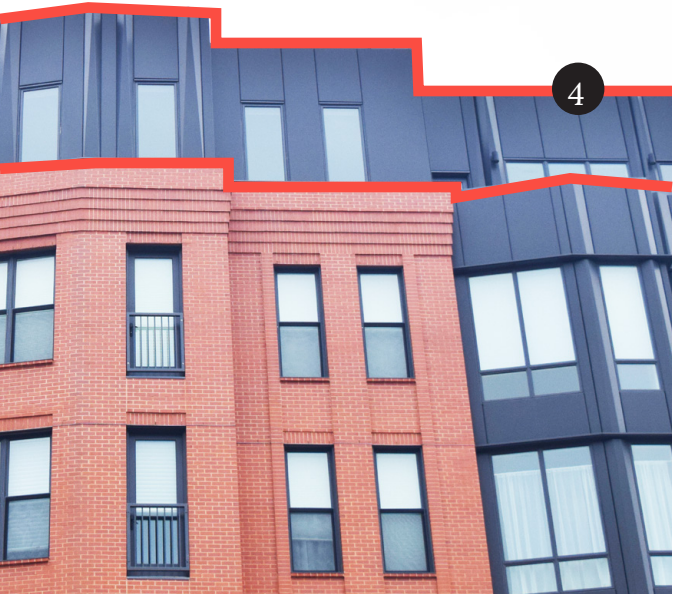
GUIDELINES

- 1 Use materials that complement the overall architectural expression. Use reveals, trim, and thoughtful detailing to resolve material transitions, such as between building floors or at corners.
- 2 Select one primary material or color that is accompanied by secondary/accent materials. A smaller number of well-composed materials or colors, or even a single material or color used on a well-composed massing, is often more successful than many all used at once.
- 3 Consider differentiating the expression of different programs in the facade by using changes of plane, fenestration patterns, and other architectural elements to define the boundaries of the different uses.
- 4 If a building has multiple frontages, consider how material and fenestration composition can express a hierarchy.

- 5 Compose windows and materials with a clear pattern or design intent. Relate the location of windows across floors.
- 6 Orient windows and glazed areas to maximize southern exposure.
- 7 The material and spacing of railings and railing supports should not overwhelm the building facade.
- 8 To meet the City of Boston’s net zero carbon goals, consider using window-to-wall ratios.



South Boston



Multifamily building in Back Bary



East Boston



South End

MATERIALS

INTENT

Choice of facade materials has a long-lasting impact on the look, feel, and resilience of a neighborhood. Materials should be selected to be durable and long-lasting, and they should contribute to the local context.

GUIDELINES

- 1 Factor the embodied carbon and environmental impacts of materials into the design process.
- 2 Use durable, high-quality, and sustainable materials such as (but not limited to) wood, masonry, terracotta, and metal.
- 3 Avoid materials that are not durable, such as EIFS, thin-brick, and vinyl siding.
- 4 Study and demonstrate how materials will age and weather. In Boston’s climate, facade materials can become discolored over time and lose their initial attractive appearance.
- 5 Use materials that can be cleaned easily.
- 6 If a garage door faces the street, use high-quality materials such as wood or composite and avoid vinyl. Consider windows or other ways to avoid blank facades.
- 7 Reduce the potential for bird strikes by using low-reflectance materials, translucent films and stippled patterns, and/or bird-friendly glazing products.
- 8 On all flat roofs, consider using light- or white-colored coverings with a solar reflectance index of at least 82.



Washington Ave, Downtown



Historic homes in the South End



Huntington Theatre and New England Conservatory

ACTIVE EDGES

INTENT

Blank walls (walls without windows, doors, or other openings) can make places uninviting, while active edges enhance the streetscape and create a sense of place. Minimize the use of blank walls wherever possible, especially at the ground floor.

GUIDELINES

- 1 In many areas of the city, at least 50% of any mixed-use building that is oriented along a major street should be occupied by active uses. Special considerations may be given for projects that must raise their ground floor to comply with Article 25A. Refer to the City of Boston Zoning Code.
- 2 Create “eyes on the street” by focusing amenity spaces, public programs, and common programs along the front yard and other shared open spaces.
- 3 Connect and extend interior uses to the public realm through facade transparency and openings, indoor/outdoor hybrid spaces, and connected programs such as outdoor cafe seating.
- 4 Provide glazing for as much of the horizontal length of the storefront as possible.
- 5 Blank walls are discouraged on facades near intersections and on facades facing through-block connections. When long blank walls are unavoidable, consider how composition of materials, public art, or architectural lighting can create visual interest.
- 6 Where applicable, blank walls longer than 15 feet are not allowed facing the public right-of-way. Refer to the City of Boston Zoning Code.



Brighton avenue



Garage B at the Speedway in Allston

STOREFRONTS

INTENT

Commercial storefronts bring life to the community and create social, economic, and cultural centers in neighborhood squares and main streets. Successful storefronts are transparent, make their uses clear to pedestrians, and have an architectural texture that contributes to the rhythm of the streetscape.

GUIDELINES

- 1 On long facades with multiple retail spaces, modulate the size, spacing, and material expression of each storefront to create a rhythm and texture. Avoid overly long or repetitive expressions.
- 2 No more than 30% of any window should be obscured by posters, applied graphics, or storefront displays.
- 3 Distribute the spacing of opaque elements such as columns and piers to maximize transparency and window size.
- 4 Consider how canopies and awnings can distinguish building entrances, highlight window openings, and create a pedestrian sense of scale.
- 5 Use lighting to highlight architectural details and entrances. Avoid lighting that is unfocused or illuminates the entire facade.
- 6 Exterior roll-down grates and/or solid gates are discouraged. All roll-down grates should be mounted inside the door or glass and use an open mesh.



Jamaica Plain



West Roxbury

SIGNAGE & ARCHITECTURAL LIGHTING

INTENT
Signage and lighting can be important tools for way-finding, architectural texture and depth, and community expression. Their design should be balanced with safety.

- GUIDELINES**
- 1 Consider any and all signage, including both way-finding and commercial signage, in the earliest stages of design.
 - 2 Keep signage design and signage locations for residential and commercial uses separate and visually distinct.
 - 3 All wall signs and projecting signs should be located immediately above or adjacent to the entrance for the associated use. Use architectural detailing to create a sign band above all retail spaces.
 - 4 Select light fixtures that are visually consistent with the overall design of the building. When that is not possible, recess or screen the fixtures to minimize their appearance.
 - 5 No architectural lighting should be oriented at an angle greater than 90 degrees relative to the ground; i.e., facing away from the building and toward the street.
 - 6 All light fixtures should be installed on a dimmer switch and the color and temperature of the lighting must be adjustable. Color, temperature, and brightness may be adjusted on request by the Planning Department.



Boylston St



Newbury St

UTILITIES & MECHANICAL ELEMENTS

INTENT
While utilities and mechanical elements are essential, their location and impact should be carefully considered early during the design phases in order to minimize visual and auditory impacts for residents and the public realm.

- GUIDELINES**
- 1 Direct all vents through the roof or rear wall, whenever possible, and design them so that their appearance integrates into the facade wherever possible.
 - 2 All mechanical elements that may be visible from the public right-of-way, a publicly accessible open space, or from a residential outdoor amenity space should be screened from view.
 - 3 Integrate rooftop mechanicals into overall building design.
 - 4 Use acoustic screening to minimize impacts on adjacent buildings



Cabot street



HOUSING BOSTON’S FUTURE

Housing Boston’s Future is focused on guidelines that are specific to housing. In order to adapt to the needs of many different users as populations change over time, the spaces where people eat, play, and sleep should be designed to be flexible, livable, and family-friendly. Well-designed residential buildings have the potential to foster community and create a sense of home among all residents.

PLANNING HOUSING SITES

INTENT

Residential projects, whether infill or larger projects on major corridors, should be sited with consideration to existing context and amenities, such as parks and schools.

GUIDELINES

- 1 Parking may not be located in the front yard; refer to applicable City of Boston Zoning requirements.
- 2 The primary residential entrance should be clearly visible and directly accessible from the principal street frontage.
- 3 All common residential entrances should be located as close to the public sidewalk as possible. No entrance may be located behind parking or vehicular circulation.
- 4 Consider the location and sizing of incidental and accessory open spaces, such as space for trash bins and plowed snow.
- 5 Include indoor trash rooms whenever possible. Consider access for trash removal, which should avoid blocking driveways or primary pedestrian paths.
- 6 Where a site contains surface parking, open space should be located as close to the building as possible. Avoid site configurations where residents need to walk through parking spaces to reach amenity spaces.



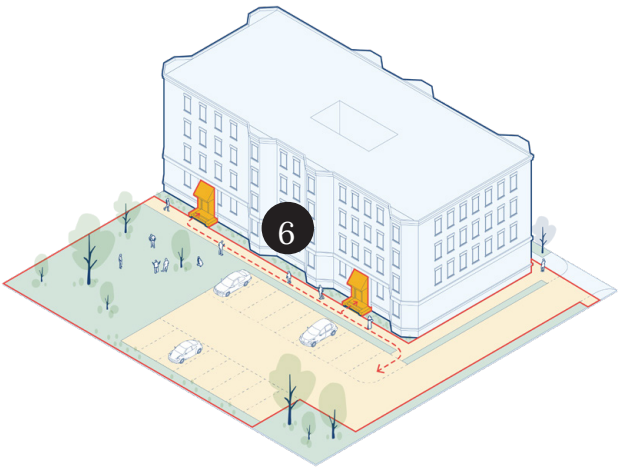
199 Boylston, Touloukian Touloukian Inc.



Hearth project in Boise



The Fowler



SHAPING HOUSING BUILDINGS

INTENT

Massing of new housing should reflect or complement existing patterns.

GUIDELINES

- 1 Consider site organizations and building typologies that enable internal open space, such as row house mews, garden courts, and courtyard buildings.
- 2 All ground-floor amenity spaces intended for the use of multiple units should be at least 10 feet in depth and 10 feet in length.
- 3 All decks and balconies should have the following minimum dimensions: at least 5 feet in depth, 5 feet in length, and have a total area of at least 30 square feet. Juliet balconies may have a smaller dimension, but usability should be considered.
- 4 Consider locating balconies to face the street, to connect the building to its context and create an active streetwall above the ground floor.
- 5 On decks and porches, natural wood, composite, metal, and PVC are preferable to bare pressure treated lumber. When pressure treated lumber is used, stain or paint it in a color that is complementary to the rest of the facade.
- 6 Permanent enclosure of any existing porch, deck, or balcony is discouraged.
- 7 Keep residential entrances separate from commercial entrances. When they must be located close together, use architectural elements like glazing, material changes, recesses, and canopies to differentiate between the different programs.



ISA + Sam Oberter Photography



Boylston St



Periscope House, Primary



27 H Street Residences, Touloukian Touloukian Inc.

- 8 Minimize the visual impact of roofdecks on the public realm. Roof decks are only permitted on flat roofs with a slope less than five degrees. Refer to Boston Zoning Code.
- 9 When using historic roof forms such as Mansards, study contextual examples of these forms and their details. Contemporary interpretations of historic forms are encouraged, but should be derived from and relate to historic details.
- 10 On pitched roofs, consider using light-colored materials with a solar reflectance index of at least 39.
- 11 Choose dormer forms that are complementary to the overall building form.
- 12 Dormers should ideally be set lower than the ridge of the main roof. They should also be set back from all other roof edges. The vertical face of all dormers should ideally be further back and at minimum align with or project no farther forward than the face of the lower building stories.
- 13 Shed dormers should have a minimum slope of 3.5-to-12, which allows the use of shingles as a roof covering.
- 14 On all flat roofs, consider using light- or white-colored coverings with a solar reflectance index of at least 82.



Jamaica Plain



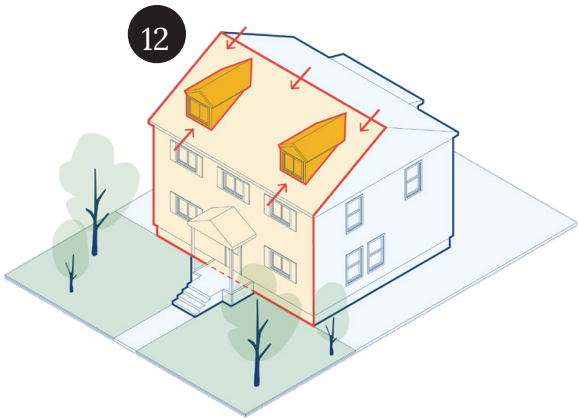
Dorchester



Arkitema/Lars Just



South End townhouses



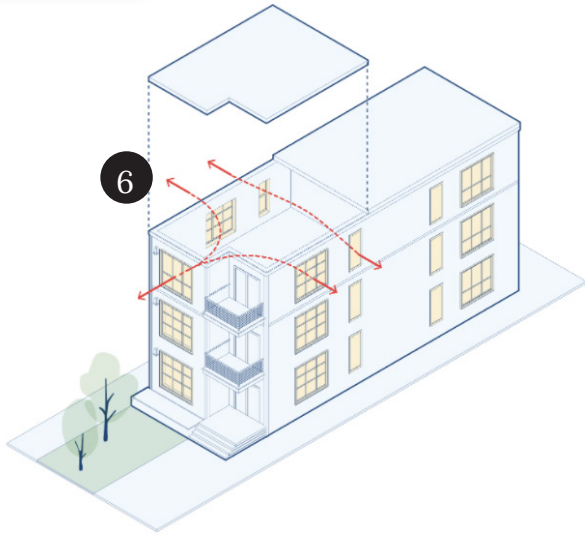
Dormer diagram

PROGRAMMING HEALTHY AND FAMILY-FRIENDLY SPACES

RESIDENTIAL LAYOUT

GUIDELINES

- 1 Various agencies, including EOHLC, MOH, and CBH have standards for residential unit sizes, depending on project type and population served. Please refer to these guidelines if your project is subject to their requirements.
- 2 In early planning stages of a project, identify potential users and investigate how their identity can be affirmed through architecture, site design, and programming.
- 3 Consider how a range of unit types and unit sizes can accommodate a variety of family types. Large units, especially those that can support families such as two- and three-bedrooms, are strongly encouraged.
- 4 Prioritize flexibility from the earliest design phases, for larger scale projects . Structures that primarily use columns provide greater flexibility for residents in both the near-term and long-term, while structures using a light-wood frame construction can be difficult to adapt to the needs of different residents over time.
- 5 Group vertical back-of-house spaces such as mechanical chases and elevators close together. Avoid locating these spaces entirely within units.
- 6 Wherever possible, place windows on multiple walls in the same room to allow for cross-ventilation, promote air circulation, and reduce reliance on artificial cooling.



COMFORT

GUIDELINES

- 1 Various agencies, including EOHLC, MOH, and CBH have standards for interior comfort, depending on project type and population served.
- 2 Provide a mix of lighting options, such as overhead, task, and accent lighting. Use LED fixtures that allow the brightness and temperature to be adjusted, and make those controls available in all public spaces.
- 3 Maximize natural light in interior corridors. Use lightwells and windows at hallway ends to bring light into double-loaded corridors, and prioritize single-loaded corridors where feasible.
- 4 Use floor and wall finishes that minimize noise transmission and echo.
- 5 Provide access to natural light, and utilize operable windows to make spaces comfortable and inviting.
- 6 Provide operable shades, sunscreens, and window controls. When possible, consider programmable/automatic controls that respond to solar conditions.
- 7 Use light shelves, reflective surfaces, and interior color selection to enhance natural light penetration and distribution.

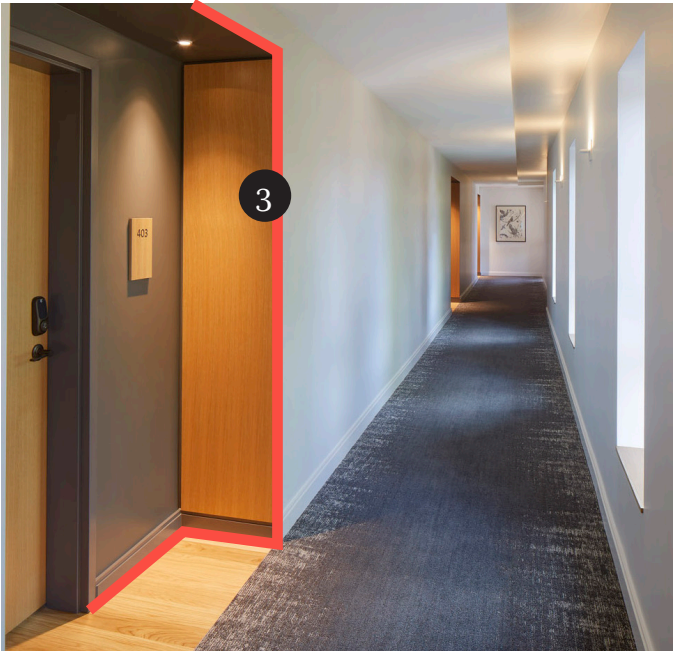


ISA

COMMON CIRCULATION

GUIDELINES

- 1 Ensure that elevators and stairwells are well-lit, well-marked, and well-maintained.
- 2 Use sound-absorbing materials and sound insulation, especially for units adjacent to common spaces and for buildings adjacent to highways, rail tracks, and other high-intensity corridors.
- 3 Consider recessing individual unit entrances from the main corridor to create an informal interior “porch” that could be used for informal socializing, decorating, stroller storage, etc. However, these spaces should not be overly deep so as to create concealed corners.
- 4 Design entrances and pathways to accommodate a variety of users, such as families with strollers and wheelchair users.

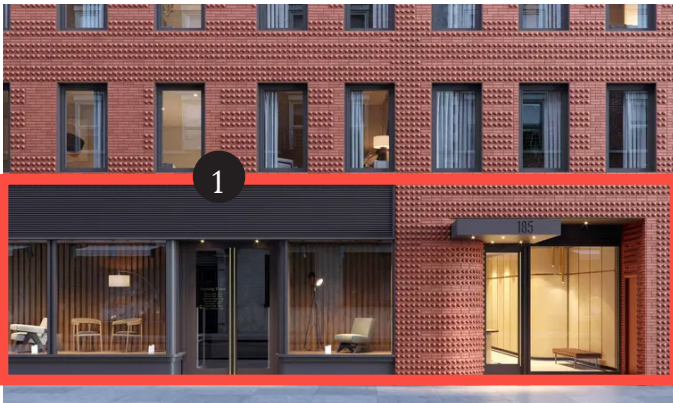


Bruce T Martin Photography

COMMON AMENITY SPACES

GUIDELINES

- 1 Clearly distinguish access to private spaces from access to public spaces.
- 2 Create visual connections between private open space and lobbies, common spaces, and corridors.
- 3 Minimize travel time to common amenity spaces by locating them near elevators and stairs. Where feasible, distribute amenity spaces across multiple floors to increase access.
- 4 Create flexibility by utilizing elements such as partitions, movable furniture, and adjustable lighting controls.
- 5 Program amenity spaces for a variety of ages, including play areas for children.



The Grand Mulberry



Bruce T Martin Photography

