

Appendix i.
Introduction to Downtown
Design and Development Standards



WHAT ARE DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT STANDARDS ?

WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT ?

HOW DO THEY EFFECT REDEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY & QUALITY ?

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Defined ...

Design Guidelines: Formal set of guidelines (with oversight by a board comprised of area stakeholders, neighborhood representatives, and design professionals) for use by investors doing projects within priority areas. Guidelines address character and quality levels and frame discussions with staff.

Design Standards: Formal set of standards (either administered through an appointed design review committee and/or municipal staff) for development which specify certain character and quality levels for built and natural environments.

Development Standard Waivers: During approval processes, cities may grant waivers or variances for items including height limits, setbacks, density, lot coverage, rear access, etc.

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Redevelopment challenges ...

- Difficult to assemble sites able to accommodate development
- Comparatively high land costs (to fringe locations outside the core)
- Often require more complex financing package
- Infrastructure is likely aged and limited
- Lot tend to lack appropriate depth and curb cuts are often frequent
- Lenders perceive project risk to be greater and markets narrow
- Rental rates I sale prices during early phases tend to be lower while costs tend to be higher

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Redevelopment truths ...

- For the reasons state above ... projects tend to be at a competitive disadvantage
- Public and private partnerships are essential in order to prove-up market opportunities
- Success depends on equalization of economic risk and reward
- Private investment will only occur after the public commits ...

.... by “readying in the environment for investment” and one way they do that is by raising the bar and enforcing it consistently.

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Top myths about design and development standards and guidelines...

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Myth No. 1:

Developers don't want to be told what to do.

In a survey of developers, when asked their opinion of design and development standards, they responded ...

“we prefer that standards be in place, since we are guaranteed that our investment will be protected; but only if they are consistently applied.

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Myth No. 2:

Design and development standards will impose additional costs that will render projects financially infeasible.

Ninety (90) percent of early redevelopment projects report an average economic “gap” (difference between forecasted revenue and projects costs) of **30%** ... with and without the presence of design standards.

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East Colfax Avenue – Main Street Zoning Case Study

Denver, CO

- A sample development proforma was prepared for use as a comparative tool to evaluate development alternatives and the impact of select variables on project feasibility;
- Select **variables** (lot size, FAR, parking ratio and type, use program, land cost) were identified by the stakeholder group and **tested** during the meeting to understand their impact on the feasibility of a range of development concepts;
- **More than 80 proformas were prepared.**

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East Colfax Avenue – Main Street Zoning Case Study cont'd Denver, CO

Strategies which improved project economic feasibility included:

- adjustment in parking ratio and cost based on the assumption that at least a portion of the parking would be provided at a node;
- increase in FAR to a certain point;
- reduction in land cost assuming a price write-down;
- balanced use of bulk plane regulations; and
- financial incentives.

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Myth No. 3:

Government should leave the market alone. It will take care of itself.

Actually, this is a fact!

Without design and development standards, developers will build for the market you have, not the market you hope to have. (Think: Lowest common denominator.)

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Myth No. 4:

Design and development standards will protect a community from what they don't want and guarantee what they do want.

Design and development standards should only be prepared with an understanding of real estate finance, development and industry trends. Without this, you won't be able to design your way out of reality.

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Myth No. 5:

Developers, especially nationally-recognized commercial developers, have their own designs and can't be influenced by local standards.

If a developer wants to be in a market badly enough, they will adjust their design, if functionally sound, to comply with local standards. Cities should, however, be prepared to participate at some level in order to minimize risk.

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Myth No. 6:

Standards and guidelines create an additional layer of “government” that can be addressed by more restrictive regulations.

Regulations tend to be written to guard against the “worst possible outcome,” while guidelines and standards tend to encourage the “best possible result.”

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Myth No. 6 cont'd:

Standards and guidelines create an additional layer of “government” that can be addressed by more restrictive regulations.

While still ensuring compatible uses, guidelines focus more attention on physical aspects of private buildings that impact the quality of the public realm, such as building height and placement, and where the parking goes; in addition to encouraging walking and biking.

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Myth No. 7:

Building design has little to do with how much, where and why people shop.

What makes a potential shopper more likely to enter a store?

Believe it or not ... architectural features that attenuate the path from public to private spaces, such as sidewalk dining, benches against facades, placards and merchandise in the frontage zone, entry alcoves flanked by display windows, roll-up and other wide-open warm-weather facades, arcades, window counters and window bars (the drinking kind), and upstairs balconies or other overhangs.

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Myth No. 8:

Winston Churchill had no idea what he was talking about.

Active facades provide the street with interest and energy. To ensure active facades, standards should specify percentages of openings, encourage rhythm, and limit repetition.

Retail uses in active facade zones should have openings a minimum of every 60% of frontage, or a window or door every 10 feet every 10 feet or less, in addition to few, if any, blank walls.

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Objective of design and development standards ...

.... Protect an area's character by ensuring that new investment enhances the existing built environment, and provides a minimum level of design appropriateness.

Rather than being an obstacle to quality building design, guidelines should be treated as a design framework within which skilled design professionals can respond creatively.

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Standards should be used to inform and direct, but not stifle creativity.

Standards should build a framework within which builders, developers, and the public sector can actively encourage revitalization, while being secure in the knowledge that individual contributions will reinforce the whole.

They should distill regional and local character and materials and use them to ensure that existing buildings can best express the character of a place.