



## URBAN DESIGN STUDIO

City Hall • 200 N. Spring Street, Room 705 • Los Angeles, CA 90012



DATE: January 29, 2007

TO: Our Website Users

FROM: Emily Gabel-Luddy  
Urban Designer/Associate Zoning Administrator

SUBJECT: **CHECKLIST FOR A MORE WALKABLE CITY: PILOT PROJECT  
FOR SITE PLAN REVIEW AND CITYWIDE PLANNING COMMISSION CASES**

The Walkability Checklist represents the culmination of an interdepartmental working group headed by the Planning Department, and including, among others, the participation of the City's Pedestrian Advisory Committee and other city departments. It focuses on elements and techniques used to enhance the pedestrian experience of our City's sidewalks and building frontages. Many of these elements will be familiar to you.

On January 11, 2007, the Citywide Planning Commission considered the Draft Checklist and directed staff to test it in a pilot project to be conducted over the next 2-3 months. Objectives of the Pilot are to determine whether the Checklist can be easily understood and practically applied all users.

The Pilot Project will involve Planning staff who clear projects subject to the Site Plan Review Ordinance as well as staff who prepare recommendations to the Citywide Planning Commission on large projects (Hearing Examiner Reports).

The Citywide Planning Commission anticipates that Hearing Examiner Reports will discuss the extent to which a proposed project contributes to the pedestrian experience. Towards this end, I am sending you a copy of the Draft Walkability Checklist. It may also be viewed on line at [www.lacity.org/PLN](http://www.lacity.org/PLN).

Once the pilot project is completed, around the end of March 2007, we will assess and make recommendations for modification. At this time we also anticipate to incorporate photos and sketches to provide useful visual examples.

### ***Your Feedback is Welcome***

Please send your comments, questions or feedback to myself ([Emily.Gabel@lacity.org](mailto:Emily.Gabel@lacity.org)) or Simon Pastucha ([Simon.Pastucha@lacity.org](mailto:Simon.Pastucha@lacity.org)). The Urban Design Studio, Room 705, 200 North Spring Street, Los Angeles, CA 90012.

EGL:jh



## City Planning Department

City Hall • 200 N. Spring Street, Room 525 • Los Angeles, CA 90012



January 11, 2007

TO: S. Gail Goldberg, Director of Planning

FROM: Naomi Guth, Citywide Planning Division *NG*  
Emily Gabel, Urban Design Studio *EG*

SUBJECT: **DIRECTOR'S REPORT TO CITY PLANNING COMMISSION  
WALKABILITY CHECKLIST**

This Walkability Checklist for Site Plan Review is a framework to assist planning staff in assessing the pedestrian orientation of projects subject to site plan review. In late 2005, members of the City's Pedestrian Advisory Committee (PAC) met with the then Acting Planning Director to discuss methods for creating a better pedestrian experience throughout the City. The site plan review process was identified as a good opportunity for a first step and a demonstration effort. As a discretionary action that entails the review of site plans, this process is an opportunity to encourage proposed development projects to meet the needs of pedestrians. Subsequently, in February 2006, City Council Motion 06-0282 was passed, directing the City Planning Department to develop a walkability checklist for site plan review.

- This Checklist identifies design elements that are important in creating an active and safe pedestrian environment and will guide staff who may have limited urban design experience. In completing the site plan review for a proposed project, a planner will be able to look for these pedestrian-oriented design elements in order to achieve accessibility, comfort and safety for pedestrian users of both the private and public realms of a project.
- This Checklist implements the goals, objectives and policies of the General Plan. Specifically, the Framework Element addresses urban design and pedestrian orientation in "Chapter 5: Urban Form and Neighborhood Design." Community Plans incorporate these urban form goals, objectives and policies, and establish implementation programs for respective communities. Where Community Plans and/or other adopted plans provide insufficient guidance to address the broader context of urban form and designing for pedestrians, this Checklist provides details, guidance, and rationale to enhance the pedestrian perspective and meeting pedestrians' needs.
- The guidelines included in this Checklist are not mandatory. Furthermore, not every guideline will be appropriate for every project. The objective is to achieve implementation of at least some of these guidelines in every project, and thereby improve pedestrian access, comfort and safety.

This Checklist is the City Planning Department's first step in implementing walkability objectives. Department staff will be encouraged to include a walkability discussion in all staff reports for projects subject to Site Plan Review, and address appropriate walkability elements from the Checklist. Walkability is an important component of urban design. It is a vital component of livable neighborhoods, smart growth, and transit oriented areas. Now that the Urban Design Studio has been created, this effort will be integrated into the Urban Design work program. The Department's Urban Design Studio will enhance this effort, develop guidelines, and work to incorporate such applicable design elements throughout the various plans and project reviews completed by Department staff.

# **Guidance For Site Plan Review**

## **WALKABILITY CHECKLIST**

“Translate the Framework Element’s intent with respect to citywide urban form and neighborhood design to the community and neighborhood levels through locally prepared plans that build on each neighborhood’s attributes, emphasize quality of development, and provide or advocate “proactive” implementation programs.”

*Objective 5.1, Chapter 5: Urban Form and Neighborhood Design, Framework Element of the General Plan*

## **Guidance for Site Plan Review: Walkability Checklist**

The purpose of this **Guidance for Site Plan Review: Walkability Checklist** is to guide Department of City Planning staff in working with developers to make developments more “walkable;” that is, to enhance pedestrian activity, access, comfort and safety. At the same time, this Walkability Checklist encourages planners and developers to protect neighborhood character and pursue high quality urban form.

Every project is unique and will have a unique site plan design solution for improving walkability. This Walkability Checklist provides a list of the multiple facets of walkability. Each of the items here should be considered in a proposed project, although it is understood that not all will be appropriate in every proposed project. While the items here are not requirements and are not part of the zoning code, incorporating at least some of these guidelines will create more walkable environments and higher quality urban form, and thereby also contribute to the success of the proposed project.

## **THE PRIVATE REALM**

### **Pedestrian Orientation in the Private Realm of the Proposed Project**

## **Building Orientation**

A building's placement on a site establishes a relationship to the sidewalk and street.

*Ideally, a building's orientation should:*

- ~ Define and enliven the public realm by connecting to the sidewalk and street;
  - ~ Enhance pedestrian comfort by contributing to a human scale (i.e., features that fit well with the average person's physical capabilities and senses); and,
- ~ Help to reinforce/create neighborhood identity and "place making."

## Building Orientation

*Residential, commercial, public facilities and open space uses:*

- The primary entrance for pedestrians should be at grade level from the public way and be easily accessible from transit stops, with as direct a path as possible to the transit stop. Retail establishments should maintain at least one entrance from the public way with doors unlocked during regular business hours.
- For residential entrances to individual units on all streets, and especially on commercial streets, a transition from the street/sidewalk to the front door should be created, such as grade separation, landscaping, and/or porches without negatively affecting the street wall.
- The main pedestrian entrance should be configured to be fully accessible per the ADA, such that an auxiliary approach for persons with mobility limitations (such as a ramp next to the main path to the primary entry) would not be necessary. For example, when the main finish elevation of the building is at an elevation above or below the finish elevation of the sidewalk, then the path into the building entry is a straight line perpendicular to a straight street (or radially to a curved street) that is accessible to persons with disabilities.
- Especially on long blocks, passageways or paseos should be incorporated into mid-block developments which facilitate pedestrian movement through the depth of the block to the front of the next parallel block, such that pedestrians need not walk the circumference of a block in order to access the middle of the next parallel block or alley or parking behind the block.

## Building Orientation

- Where incorporated, mid-block passageways or paseos should be active, visually interesting spaces, and safe. Activities could include: building entrances; windows; seating; dining; water features; kiosks; vending or displays. Visually interesting features could include: colors; textures; architectural elements; public art; pedestrian-level lighting.

### *Industrial uses only:*

- The primary entrance to the building should be visible from the street and sidewalk.
- There should be a pedestrian path from the sidewalk to the primary entrance, which connects the building to the sidewalk and streetscape.

## Building Orientation



Pedestrian entrances at grade level; doors unlocked during regular business hours.



Paseos facilitate pedestrian movement through the depth of the block to the alley and/or parking behind the block.

## **Building Frontage**

The building frontage can be employed to meet many objectives for a safe, accessible, and comfortable pedestrian environment.

*Ideally, the building frontage should:*

- ~ Create a sense of enclosure and a sense of an “outdoor room” by being close to the front property line and contributing to the street;
  - ~ Add visual interest by providing a rich and interesting façade, including variation in height, massing, rhythm and/or texture compared to the surrounding buildings;
- ~ Be compatible with and contribute to the street and neighborhood character;
  - ~ Emphasize and facilitate pedestrian movement and comfort, and thereby support an active, engaging environment;
- ~ Create a sense of human scale (i.e., features that fit well with the physical capabilities and senses of the average person);
  - ~ Enhance pedestrian comfort by providing views into buildings and beyond the street wall;
- ~ Enhance pedestrian comfort by providing shade and reducing heat gain (i.e., through features such as awnings); and,
  - ~ Enhance pedestrian comfort and safety by providing facades that are “eyes on the street” (i.e., through windows that look out onto the street).

## Building Frontage

*Residential, commercial, public facilities and open space uses:*

- The façade should include a variety of features such as: a combination of different textures, colors and materials; distinctive architectural features; display windows; signage; setbacks and differentiated massing; rooflines; shade and shadow textures.
- The façade should create or reinforce an existing façade rhythm.
- Upper floors should be differentiated from the ground floor.
- There should be no blank walls. Walls should be interesting facades by incorporating a combination of elements such as: sculpted, carved or penetrated wall surface; planters; murals; mosaics; public art; awnings; lighting.
- The building frontage should include overhead architectural features, such as awnings, canopies, trellises or cornice treatments.
- At corners, the building frontage should consider building cut-offs in response to any need to accommodate pedestrians and to protect pedestrian safety, security and enjoyment.

## Building Frontage

- Any spaces created by setbacks, building cut-offs and/or breaks in exterior walls should be turned into active spaces, such as active plazas or courtyards (activities could include: dining; seating; water features; kiosks; vending or displays). Where appropriate given the character of the street and a sidewalk that is narrower than desired, the setback should be increased to create more space for such active plazas or courtyards and/or additional pedestrian amenities or landscaping.
- Where there are breaks or openings in the ground floor building façade, architectural features should be applied to create continuity across the break(s).
- The building should be placed at the front property line or at the required setback; that is, the building should not be set back further than the required setback in order to be as close as possible to the front property line and maintain a strong street wall.

### *Commercial uses only:*

- In non-residential uses, most (i.e., 75%) of the ground floor building façade should be devoted to pedestrian entrances, pedestrian-level display windows and/or pedestrian-level windows affording views into and out of the building interior. Display windows and other pedestrian-level windows should not be covered or otherwise blocked to prevent views during regular business hours.

## Building Frontage

### *Industrial uses only:*

- There should not be large blank walls or blank building facades along the street frontage. Office space should be placed along the street frontage with windows facing the street. Large walls and building facades fronting the street could be made more interesting by incorporating elements such as: sculpted, carved or penetrated wall surface; planters; murals; mosaics; public art; awnings.
- To reduce massiveness and scale, the building should have a variety of facades by employing plane variation, varied roof/parapet line or height, windows, color, different textures or construction material or other architectural elements.
- The building wall should be used as the security between the structure and the street, and the construction of fences in front of the building wall is strongly discouraged.

## Building Frontage



Reinforcing a façade rhythm, upper floors differentiated from the ground floor, overhead architectural features included.



Walls should be interesting facades, incorporating elements such as murals.

## Building Frontage



At corners, the building frontage should consider building cut-offs in response to any need to accommodate pedestrians and to protect pedestrian safety, security and enjoyment.

## **On-Site Landscaping (excluding parking areas)**

On-site landscaping contributes to the public realm because it acts as an extension of the public right-of-way for passers-by. Thus, on-site landscaping is important from a visual standpoint by helping to create the sense of an “outdoor room” and is also important for pedestrian comfort.

*Ideally, on-site landscaping should:*

- ~ Add visual interest;
  - ~ Define the pedestrian zone by distinguishing the private realm beyond the lot line from the public pedestrian corridor and creating a transition between the two realms; and,
- ~ Contribute to pedestrian comfort, such as providing shade and/or providing a sense of transparency beyond the street wall; and,
  - ~ Create a neighborhood identity and contribute to “place making.”

## On-Site Landscaping

*Residential, commercial, industrial, public facilities, and open space uses:*

- Canopy trees (in addition to street trees) should be provided in landscaped areas. For example, a row of trees could be provided on both sides of the sidewalk.
- Landscaping should not impede pedestrian movement or views. For example, avoid tall shrubbery immediately adjacent to the sidewalk.
- Trees should be considered especially where such additional vertical elements reinforce or contribute to the street wall and a sense of enclosure.

## Off-Street Parking and Driveways

In an environment where pedestrians and automobiles must both be accommodated, the safety of the pedestrian is primary. When pedestrians have to determine their own path and navigate through driveways and parking lots, confusion and conflicts between pedestrians and motorists will result.

*Ideally, the site design of developments should:*

- ~ Provide clear and convenient access for pedestrians;
  - ~ Prevent auto-pedestrian conflicts;
- ~ Balance auto and pedestrian use of sidewalks/driveways;
  - ~ Encourage pedestrians and motorists to have a greater level of caution;
- ~ Maintain continuity of the sidewalk;
  - ~ Maintain the street character, street wall and sense of enclosure by minimizing and/or mitigating the impact of the parking facility location and design; and,
- ~ Provide parking facilities that complement the main building (i.e., setbacks, landscaping, texture, colors, scale, other architectural features) and that contribute to “place making” and the façade rhythm of the building and nearby structures.

## Off-Street Parking and Driveways

### *Residential, commercial, public facilities and open space uses:*

- Parking should be located at the rear of the building rather than adjoining the adjacent major street.
- Alleys should be used to access the parking behind the building. If no alley is available, access should be created from a side street.
- Vehicle access into and from the site should be accommodated with as few driveways as possible to the street; and, where available, the site plan should encourage and accommodate as much vehicle access as possible from side streets and/or alleys.
- The width of each driveway should meet and not exceed the standard width identified as necessary to accommodate vehicles.

### *Residential uses only:*

- There should be no parking within the front setback of the building, except in an allowed driveway. Techniques and features, such as heavy landscaping or garden walls, should be used to help mitigate the impact of any parking in the front setback.

## Off-Street Parking and Driveways

*Residential, commercial, industrial, public facilities and open space uses:*

- All surface parking adjoining the street should be screened by a durable barrier (i.e., a solid wall, fence, berm, hedge) and landscaping that is tall enough to at least screen car headlights.
- Easily identifiable pedestrian walkways should be provided from the parking to the sidewalk and to the entrance of the building. Techniques, such as landscaped lightwells and surface treatments, could be used.
- All parking areas and integrated pedestrian walkways should be illuminated with adequate, uniform and glare-free lighting such that there is even light distribution and there are no harsh shadows.
- Driveways that have been or are to be abandoned should be reconstructed as sidewalks.
- Sub-standard driveways should be reconstructed to meet current ADA requirements.

## **Building Signage and Lighting**

In addition to identifying a business, a sign on a building is also a visual cue to pedestrians that adds to the sense of place and provides a sense of coherence within the immediate environment. In other words, building signage is part of the visual urban language and contributes to neighborhood identity and “place making.” Building lighting supplements street lighting and helps illuminate the sidewalk and pedestrian pathways.

*Ideally, building signage and lighting should:*

- ~ Be consistent with and complement the physical elements of the building and nearby buildings;
  - ~ Complement the scale and character of the street;
- ~ Enhance pedestrian safety and comfort; and,
  - ~ Create a sense of human scale (i.e., fits well with the physical capabilities and sense of the average person).

## **Building Signage and Lighting**

*Residential, commercial, public facilities and open space uses:*

- The building façade should include pedestrian-scale signage, i.e., at a height and of a size that is visible to pedestrians, assists in identifying the structure and use, and facilitates access to the entrance.
  
- Pedestrian-level lighting should be provided on building facades and around the site along pedestrian pathways.

## **THE PUBLIC REALM**

### **Pedestrian Orientation in the Public Realm associated with the Proposed Project**

## Sidewalks

The Framework Element of the General Plan clearly identifies objectives and policies for improving the quality of the public realm, and sidewalks are specifically identified. Policy 5.5.4 of the Framework Element gives specific direction to, “determine the appropriate urban design elements at the neighborhood level, such as sidewalk width and materials, street lights and trees, bus shelters and benches, and other street furniture.”

*In carrying out this policy, the sidewalk design and elements within the sidewalk should:*

- ~ Delineate the pedestrian corridor (such as including features that create a consistent rhythm, i.e., consistent height of light poles or consistent shade pattern of trees);
  - ~ Provide for pedestrian safety, which includes: creating a clear separation from the roadway and from traffic; creating a buffer between pedestrians and moving vehicles; preventing inconvenience and/or hazards to pedestrians;
- ~ Encourage pedestrian travel;
  - ~ Create active environments by being wide enough to accommodate the pedestrian flow yet contained in order to create a sense of crowding (i.e., a width that allows for a critical mass of walkers who can stroll, move back and forth, talk with others as well as move through a crowd, while not being so wide that the sidewalk feels desolate);
- ~ Create active environments by supporting a variety of pedestrian activities;
  - ~ Provide for pedestrian comfort, which includes visual appeal, shade, and places to rest; and,
- ~ Create, preserve and enhance neighborhood identity and “place making.”

*Special Note on terminology used in this section:*

The area containing the sidewalk is often described in terms of 3 “zones.” The *landscape/furniture zone plus curb* is the area between the curb face and the front edge of the walkway. The *pedestrian zone* is the area of the sidewalk corridor that is specifically reserved for pedestrian travel. The *frontage zone* is the area between the pedestrian zone and the private property line, while not including any private property area. Every location may not have all three zones.

*Residential, commercial, industrial, public facilities and open space uses:*

- The sidewalk should be continuous and straight or relatively straight.
- Especially on long blocks, public alleys and/or easements should be used to create mid-block passageways or paseos which facilitate pedestrian movement from the sidewalk through the depth of the block to the front of the next parallel block such that pedestrian need not walk the entire circumference of a block in order to access the middle of the next parallel block or alley or parking behind the block.
- Where incorporated, mid-block passageways or paseos should be active, visually interesting, and safe places, and include features such as: furniture; various colors; various textures; various architectural features; public art; information kiosks; displays; pedestrian-level lighting.

### Guidelines for the landscape/furniture zone

*Please note that all of the following must satisfy Department of Public Works regulations.*

- The landscape/furniture zone should maximize shade-producing street trees, including interspersing them with existing or proposed palms.
- Shade trees should be planted as close to one another as possible.
- The landscape/furniture zone should include features that create a buffer between the sidewalk and the roadway, especially where vehicular movement is allowed in the curb lane, which separates pedestrians from moving vehicles. Such features include bollards, planters and parkways.
- The landscape/furniture zone should include street furniture (i.e., benches, newspaper racks, pedestrian information kiosks, bicycle racks, bus shelters).
- The landscape/furniture zone should include pedestrian-level lighting. For example, such lighting could be provided with bollards that are equipped with a low level light source or mounted (at a height up to 15') on decorative poles.
- Where provided, a parkway should be wide enough to accommodate street trees.
- Where provided, a parkway should be continuously planted with ground cover, low-growing vegetation and/or other permeable materials (i.e., gravel, stabilized decomposed granite).

## **Sidewalks**

- Where there is an on-street parking lane next to the curb, a parkway that is planted with shrubs should provide a street-to-sidewalk connector path.
- Where provided, a parkway should be irrigated in a manner that prevents wet sidewalks.
- Where there is an existing transit stop, a paved boarding area should be provided.

## Sidewalks



Maximize shade-producing street trees, including interspersing them with existing or proposed palms.



Pedestrian-level lighting in the landscape/furniture zone.

## Crosswalks/Street Crossing

Pedestrian safety is the primary concern in designing and managing street crossings. At the same time, street crossings link one side of the street to another both physically and visually, and thus unify elements throughout the streetscape. Crossings that are safe and well-marked support active, pedestrian-friendly environments.

*Ideally, street crossings should:*

- ~ Be appropriately placed and provide effective pedestrian crossing facilities for the anticipated pedestrian flow and use and the desired character of the street;
  - ~ Improve visibility of pedestrians and motorists;
- ~ Slow vehicle speeds;
  - ~ Increase the level of caution taken by pedestrians and motorists;
- ~ Create linkage and a sense of enclosure by connecting the two sides of the street while marking a block's mid-point or end-point; and,
  - ~ Contribute to neighborhood identity and "place making."

*Residential, commercial, industrial, public facilities and open space uses:*

*Please note that all of the following must satisfy Department of Transportation and Department of Public Works regulations.*

- A pedestrian crossing, when incorporated, should be made as visible as possible to moving vehicles. This could include the following crossing features: crosswalk markings that include white markings; signage that clearly identifies the crossing; lighting that makes the crossing visible at night.
- A pedestrian crossing, when incorporated, should make it easy for pedestrians to see the roadway and vehicles when they are crossing the street. This could include the following crossing features: curb extensions/bump outs; not locating on-street parking spaces adjacent to the crossing.
- A pedestrian crossing, when incorporated, should provide pedestrian safety and comfort within the crossing. This could include the following crossing features: an advance stop bar in the roadway to encourage vehicles to stop well in advance of the crossing; pedestrian signals indicating when to cross; visible and easily accessible push buttons for pedestrian actuated signals; dual sidewalk ramps that are directed to each crosswalk.
- A pedestrian crossing, when incorporated on wider streets, should create the shortest possible crossing distance. This could include the following crossing features: a crossing island when it is determined that the roadway is too wide to cross all at one time; an island between a right-turn lane and a through-lane; curb extension/bump out; and a minimal curb radius.

## Crosswalks/Street Crossing



White markings make the crossing visible to moving vehicles. Curb extension helps pedestrians see the roadway. An advance stop bar encourages vehicles to stop well in advance of the crossing, thus providing greater safety for pedestrians.

## On-Street Parking

On-street parking is often desired in residential areas and commercial areas, given the convenient access it provides to entrances fronting the street. Residents, shoppers and businesses will trade off some traffic constriction in return for the access and economic benefits of on-street parking being available directly in front of desired destinations. On-street parking is thus a part of a pedestrian-oriented street with buildings and entrances fronting the main street. Furthermore, on-street parking enhances pedestrian safety by providing an additional physical and psychological buffer between pedestrians and moving vehicles in the roadway. On-street parking also minimizes pedestrian/automobile conflicts by reducing the number of vehicles using driveways that cut across the sidewalk.

*Ideally, for an active and safe pedestrian environment:*

- ~ On-street parking should be maximized;
  - ~ On-street parking should be used to delineate the pedestrian environment;  
and,
- ~ On-street parking should be a buffer between pedestrians and the roadway yet not an obstruction to the visibility of pedestrian crossings.

## **On-Street Parking**

*Residential, commercial, industrial, public facilities and open space uses:*

- On-street parking should be provided.
  
- On-street parking spaces should not be allowed within pedestrian street crossings.

## On-Street Parking



On-street parking delineates the pedestrian environment and is a buffer between pedestrians and the roadway.

## Utilities

Across the City, utility lines and equipment are often above ground and interrupt views as well as pedestrian paths of travel. The Framework Element specifically addresses utilities and the quality of the public realm in Policy 5.5.7, which states, “Promote the undergrounding of utilities throughout the City’s neighborhoods, districts, and centers.”

*Ideally, utilities should be placed underground in order to:*

- ~ Improve and preserve the character of the street and neighborhood;
  - ~ Increase the visual appeal and visual order; and,
- ~ Minimize obstructions in the pedestrian travel path.

## Utilities

*Residential, commercial, industrial, public facilities and open space uses:*

- Utilities should be placed underground.
- Utility equipment should be placed in the landscape/furniture zone of the sidewalk, outside of crosswalk areas, and away from on-street parking spaces.