



**City of  
Portland, Oregon**  
**Bureau of Development Services**  
FROM CONCEPT TO CONSTRUCTION

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## MEMORANDUM

**Date:** February 20, 2021  
**To:** Michelle Marx, PBOT  
**From:** Hannah Bryant, Design / Historic Review  
[Hannah.Bryant@portlandoregon.gov](mailto:Hannah.Bryant@portlandoregon.gov) | 503.865.6520  
**Re:** Briefing on Pedestrian Design Guide  
Summary of January 28, 2020 Design Commission hearing

Thank you for taking advantage of the opportunity to hold a preliminary briefing with the Design Commission regarding your project. I hope you find it informative and valuable as you continue with your project development. Attached is a summary of the comments provided by the Design Commission at the January 28, 2021 hearing. This summary was generated from notes taken at the public meeting and a subsequent review of the public meeting recordings. To review those recordings, please visit: <https://efiles.portlandoregon.gov/record/14330837>.

These Design Commission comments are intended to guide you in further design exploration of your project. These comments may also inform City staff when giving guidance over the course of the project development. These comments address the project as presented on January 28, 2021. As the project design evolves, the comments, too, may evolve or may no longer be pertinent.

Preliminary briefings are not intended to substitute for other Code-required land use or legislative procedures.

Please continue to coordinate with Hannah Bryant, as necessary to schedule additional briefings related to this project. The next briefing should be scheduled soon, to align with writing the draft of this language. To ensure a detailed, specific, and directive conversation, maps, and data specific to the frequency and typical conditions related to 'd' overlay and historic districts should be provided to the Commissions for review and consideration prior to the next briefings.

*Encl:*  
Summary Memo

*Cc:* Design Commission

This memo summarizes **Design Commission** design direction provided on January 28, 2021.

Commissioners in attendance on January 28, 2021 included: Julie Livingston, Chandra Robinson, Jessica Molinar, Brian McCarter, Zari Santner

**Executive Summary:** The Pedestrian Design Guide is being revised to reflect the vision and policies of the Ped PDX guidance. This document establishes sidewalk widths across the city and determines required dedications that may be necessary to meet sidewalk widths. There have been instances in which the need for a wider sidewalk at a location conflicts with established building façade lines. PBOT seeks guidance on how to develop context-specific direction while meeting capacity needs.

The Design Commission notes that while wider sidewalks are critical to a high-quality pedestrian environment in much of the city, sporadically wider sidewalks achieved through dedications are not always an improvement to the pedestrian realm. In Historic Districts, maintaining the building line set by historic resources is important to the character of the Districts and maintaining the Districts as historic resources.

### **Commission Comments**

The Portland Plan (Comprehensive Plan) differentiates between pattern areas and different neighborhood centers, districts, etc. The Design Commission questions whether the Pedestrian Guide has similar differentiation to reflect how the character of these areas, and how the sidewalks are used, are very different? The character of the neighborhoods (building scale, traffic levels, width of the existing right-of-way, presence, and size of street trees, etc.) has a lot to do with if, and to what degree, sidewalks feel compressed. Commissioners feel that uniform sidewalk widths across all neighborhoods may detract from the character of the neighborhoods, and consideration of neighborhood character is significant. For example, wider sidewalks may be appropriate in wider rights-of-way (for example, a 15' sidewalk is appropriate for an 80' wide right-of-way).

### **Corner versus Midblock Development**

Setting back new corner development to allow for more room at intersections, etc. makes more sense than setting back midblock development that is adjacent to a historic resource with a corner location. 'Corner development strengthens the sense of place and midblock development does not set the tone for the frontage the same way.' Also, when big development sets back so the street wall is behind adjacent, smaller historic development, it is negatively impactful on the pedestrian realm (see 4039 N. Mississippi). Therefore, it's important to consider what a setback will achieve with a large new development – will it actually activate the street through a deeper furnishing zone, or do site conditions or BES requirements mean it will be set back to provide for stormwater treatment planters or other unoccupiable space? It is preferable to align the new development with the street wall of adjacent buildings, resulting in a narrower sidewalk, rather than require setbacks that result in landscape buffers between the sidewalk and the new street wall.

### **Historic Districts and Historic Resources**

Maintaining continuity of street-facing building walls in a Historic District is critical. The Design Commission recognizes that in a Historic District, consistency of street-facing building walls is significant element to communicating the character and coherency of the Historic District.

When new development is adjacent to historic resources (outside of a Historic District), trying to create wider sidewalks through dedications can create awkward conditions. Commission notes specific sites where the building wall is pushed back adjacent to a historic resource, but it doesn't create an enhanced pedestrian environment (ex: 4039 N. Mississippi Ave.). When new development is adjacent to a historic

resource, it may be appropriate to match the building wall of the historic resource rather than create a building wall that steps in and out along the block frontage.

**Street Trees**

The width of the furnishing zone is important, as this zone creates the buffer between pedestrians and traffic. Also, this zone is critical for providing for healthy, large street-trees.

Street trees should fall within the purview of the Bureau of Transportation. PBOT is best equipped to ensure that the street trees are working to achieve the City’s urban tree canopy goals. There is lots of opportunity for expansion. (Kurt Krueger notes that in Seattle, street trees are managed by the transportation department.)

**Where and How Do We Get a Wider Sidewalk?**

A commissioner noted that on busy pedestrian streets, they would prefer to reduce the lanes of traffic (from two to one) to acknowledge the significance, and ensure the safety, of the pedestrian environment, rather than gaining a wider pedestrian realm in bits and pieces through dedications.

Do we have to take dedications, or are ground-level easements possible?

A commissioner questioned whether, if the goal is to ensure a more generous pedestrian realm, it is necessary to set back the property line for all levels of the building, or if we could require ground level setbacks but allow upper levels to maintain the original property line. The ramifications for developers of dedications that require all floor levels to be set back is much more significant. PBOT notes there are legal complications with requiring a ground level setback and allowing upper levels to maintain the original property line. This may be an area for further exploration.