



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

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MEMORANDUM

Date: December 28, 2020
To: Michelle Marx, PBOT
From: Hannah Bryant, Design / Historic Review
Hannah.Bryant@portlandoregon.gov | 503.865.6520
Re: Briefing on Pedestrian Design Guide
Summary of December 7, 2020 Historic Landmarks 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 brief summary of the comments provided by the Design Commission at the December 7, 2020 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/14093632/>.

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. It should be understood that these comments address the project as presented on December 7, 2020. 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.

Encl:
Summary Memo

Cc: Design Commission

This memo summarizes **Design Commission** design direction provided on December 7, 2020.

Commissioners in attendance on December 7, 2020 included: Kristen Minor, Maya Foty, Annie Mahoney, Matthew Roman, Ernestina Fuenmayor, Andrew Smith

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.

Commission Comments

Wide sidewalks do not necessarily result in comfortable pedestrian environments.

Commissioners noted that wide sidewalks don't necessarily make for a more comfortable urban pedestrian experience. They noted that wide sidewalks that are not lined with vibrant commercial businesses can feel vacant. They note that narrower sidewalks can feel more active and vibrant. Hawthorne is an example of a vibrant commercial district with narrow sidewalks. Clearly the narrow sidewalks are not a deterrent to pedestrians in this area and may even contribute to the appeal of the area. Many European cities also have narrow sidewalks but are widely considered successful pedestrian environments.

Vibrant adjacent businesses and buffer from traffic are critical.

The comfort of any sidewalk, regardless of its width, depends on pedestrians feeling buffered from vehicle traffic. Dedications from the adjacent properties to widen the through-zone does not necessarily result in being buffered from traffic.

Flexibility in the Pedestrian Guide is needed to address context in Historic Districts/Landmarks.

Commissioners requested that the Guide acknowledge the significance of historic districts and provide some flexibility to address the context when determining sidewalk widths in Historic Districts or adjacent to Historic Landmarks.

Commissioners note that some aspects of the street wall are more significant and that building owners may take advantage of flexibility if it's allowed. For example, could a new building maintain the same building line as its neighbors at its corners but then be recessed to create a plaza space to accommodate its tenants' outdoor seating? Maybe the bays between pilasters could be set back a few feet to allow for planters/outdoor seating, while allowing the pilasters to maintain the building lines set by adjacent properties.

Include language in the guide regarding historic elements in the right of way.

Please add language to encourage retaining historic sidewalk elements including stamped street and contractor names, hitching rings and metal edging at corners.

Explore opportunities to move the curb and/or reuse midblock parking spaces.

Commissioners suggest reducing the width of vehicle lanes to calm traffic could allow curbs to move out. This could result in wider sidewalks without taking additional width from building frontages. Another suggestion was expanding the sidewalk at some locations to build a curb out to close a midblock parking space – this would allow for larger street trees and plaza space, adding a needed buffer and space for activation.

Neighborhood character and diverse populations should be considered.

Communities and cultures have different traditions for how they engage with one another in the sidewalk. Right-of-way design should consider these cultural traditions. For example, which neighborhoods have street fairs that may benefit from a wider sidewalk? How can we ensure that this project reflects the values of marginalized populations?

In some neighborhoods, narrow sidewalks are part of the neighborhood character and influenced the design of adjacent buildings. The context of unique sidewalk conditions should be considered in the Guide.