Chapter 3.xx

LINCOLN DOWNTOWN DESIGN STANDARDS

The Planning Department is assigned responsibility for administration of these design standards.

Section 1. INTRODUCTION

Downtown Lincoln is the mixed-use center of the Lincoln community, offering employment, residences, education, recreation, and retailing. From the adoption of the Original Plat in 1867 through the present day, Downtown has developed as the community's most urban, most mixed, highest density neighborhood, with wide streets and sidewalks, buildings typically constructed from property-line to property-line, and relatively few but very important urban open spaces.

The purpose of the Lincoln Downtown Design Standards (LDDS) is to recognize and build upon the substantial private and public investment in Downtown Lincoln, and to strengthen the best qualities of its urban form, while encouraging compatible new construction.

The standards focus on a limited number of basic design elements which have significant effect how Downtown looks and even more importantly, on how it is experienced by residents, employees, and visitors. These standards do not guarantee good design—only the talents and efforts of owners, designers, and builders do that. But they will ensure the best practices and discourage certain negative design features, thereby strengthening Lincoln's essential center. These standards are derived from and consistent with the Downtown Master Plan and the Antelope Valley Redevelopment Plan.

Section 2. WORK REQUIRING REVIEW

The design standards apply to exterior features of projects requiring building permits in the B-4 Lincoln Central Business District or O-1 Office District, whether the project is new construction, exterior remodeling of existing buildings, or site development that does not include buildings (such as parking lots).

In the case of minor remodeling projects, the requirement is that the work not cause greater deviation from these standards–small projects may not be able to bring a property into full conformance. For projects investing more than 50% of a property's assessed valuation, the requirement is that the project meet the applicable standards to the greatest degree feasible. Review of those projects should begin with a conference with staff to seek consensus on which are the applicable standards. Disagreements will be resolved according to the procedures outlined in Section 5: Waivers and Appeal.

It is intended that both private and public property owners will comply with these standards, including voluntary cooperation by the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, City of Lincoln, State of Nebraska, and U. S. Government and any other government or agency that is not legally bound by local zoning requirements.

Interior aspects of new or existing construction does **NOT** require review under the Downtown Design Standards (although other building and zoning codes may apply).

Section 3. APPLICATION AND REVIEW PROCESS

The review process for the Downtown Design Standards largely parallels the current review processes, and is intended to be conducted without adding time to the approval process. Therefore:

- Planning staff will review projects and administratively approve those which meet the requirements of the LDDS.
- Applicants may appeal findings of the Planning Department to a design review commission. If a project is within the Capitol Environs District or a designated landmark area (such as Haymarket), the LDDS review is conducted by the Nebraska Capitol Environs Commission (NCEC) or Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) respectively.
- Appeals of projects in other areas covered by these Standards will be reviewed by the Urban Design Committee.

All efforts are made to avoid increased time for review and approval. To facilitate this review process, the applicant will be requested to submit the following items with the normal building permit application. Those items are as follows:

1. At least one black or blue line print to scale showing the street elevations and the site plan of the proposed project. For new construction, samples or photographs of proposed major materials should be submitted. For minor remodeling projects, a photograph of the existing building and sufficient written or drawn description to understand the proposed changes may be substituted.

Section 4. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

4.1 Site Development

a) Downtown buildings west of 19th Street and on North 21st Street from O to Q Streets shall be "built-to" their front property lines (and on corner lots, shall be built-to both street frontages).

Pedestrian plazas and forecourts at street level shall be permitted except on P Street from 10th to 19th Street and on North 21st Street from O to Q Streets.

b) Parking most often is provided off-site of downtown buildings. Any on-site surface parking shall be paved and must be screened with plant materials, masonry walls, or masonry and wrought iron (not chain-link) fences, or some combination thereof, to

provide at least a 90% screen from grade to 3 feet above the grade. Parking shall be set back six feet from the property line if only plant materials are used for screening or set back three feet if fence or wall are used. Parking and driveways between a building and the street are prohibited with two exceptions:

- hotels may offer drop-off lanes at their principal entrance;
- and buildings situated on a parcel occupying an entire blockface may be built to one corner (fronting two streets) and may offer screened parking behind and/or beside the building.

c) Drive-through lanes, if used, must be located behind or beside buildings, and are prohibited between the building and streets.

4.2 Building Features

a) Materials:

1. Durable masonry materials, such as stone, brick, pre-cast concrete, or poured-in-place concrete are required as the primary exterior material facing streets for downtown buildings for the first 20 (twenty) feet above street level. Ample windows are allowed but glass curtain wall structures are allowed only in the area more than 20 feet above street level. Decorative accents of durable materials including metal architectural panels, architectural tile, and metalwork are allowed. Faux brick products (not made of fired clay) are prohibited.

2. Use of lap or shingle siding of any material including wood, vinyl, cementious, or painted or corrugated metal is prohibited for downtown buildings.

3. Concrete block is prohibited as the primary material on street facades downtown.

4. Stucco or synthetic stucco is prohibited below the 12 (twelve) foot level but may be substituted above that level for the durable masonry materials described in section 4.2 a)1.

b) Parking structures and lots:

1. Parking structures shall be designed with active-use ground-floor spaces between (and including) N and R Streets, and between 7th and 21st Streets .

2. Any ground-floor parking in structures must be screened from the sidewalk.

3. Entrances and exits shall be located and grouped to minimize curb cuts and other interruptions of pedestrian movement on sidewalks.

4. Parking structures shall be designed with the appearance of horizontal floors, concealing sloped floors or ramps visible on street facades. (Entrance and exit ramps may be visible through openings on the ground floor.)

c) Roofs:

1. Downtown buildings shall conceal low pitched or nearly flat roofs behind parapet walls. Visible roofs are acceptable only on penthouses providing habitable space, set back at least 10 feet from parapet walls.

2. Mechanical equipment on rooftops shall be architecturally screened with materials compatible with the main walls of the building so they are not visible from adjacent streets.

d) Entrances and first floor windows:

1. Buildings shall have at least one principal entrance that faces the street. Buildings on corners or with multiple street frontages may have a single principal entrance, which must face a street.

2. The ground floor of buildings with frontages between (and including) N and Q Streets, and between 9th and 21st Streets shall have transparent glazing in at least 70% of the area between 4 feet and 9 feet above the sidewalk, except in the case of residential buildings. Building in other areas shall have transparent glazing in at least 50% of the area between 4 and 9 feet above the sidewalk, except in the case of buildings with first-floor residential uses.

3. Ramps for accessibility added to existing buildings, shall employ materials and design features drawn from the main structure. New buildings shall not include exterior ramps along street frontages.

4.3 Additional Pedestrian Considerations

a) To minimize interruptions of and conflicts with the pedestrian routes across adjacent sidewalks, garage doors and service bays shall not open directly onto sidewalks, but instead shall be oriented toward alleys or toward the interior of the lot. One service bay shall be permitted facing a sidewalk if a building has no alley access.

b) Sidewalk cafes and other street furniture shall be designed and located to minimize interruption of clear, direct pedestrian routes.

c) Dumpsters, service docks, transformers, and other necessary fixtures shall be located and screened so as not to be visible from adjacent sidewalks.

Section 5. WAIVERS AND APPEAL

If the proposed development plan is found by the Planning Department to be not in compliance with Downtown Design Standards, the applicant may appeal that finding to the Director of Planning, who may waive strict conformance with the Standards upon written finding that the design enhances its setting and meets the intent of the Downtown Design Standards. Owners of adjacent property within 200 feet shall be notified by first class mail of such a decision by the Planning Director, along with the Downtown Neighborhood Association and the Downtown Lincoln Association.

Decisions of the Planning Department may be appealed within 14 days of the mailing (postmark) date by a letter filed with the City Clerk. Appeals will be heard within 30 days by the Urban Design Committee (or if the subject property is already under the jurisdiction of the Capitol Environs Commission or Historic Preservation Commission, the board with jurisdiction will hear the appeal). The board shall review the proposed design and any additional information, and shall make a written finding upholding or reversing the administrative decision, within 28 days of the date of appeal, or the design shall be deemed approved. The board may find a design compatible that varies from specific design standards, but meets the overall intent of the Downtown Design Standards. If the board upholds an administrative finding that a design is not compatible, the board may recommend changes to the proposed building permit application in order to meet the intent and purpose of the Downtown Design Standards.

As soon as an appeal is received, it will concurrently be entered on the agenda of the City Council on the first available date 30 days after the date of receipt of the appeal. Adverse findings and actions of the Urban Design Committee, the Historic Preservation Commission, or the Nebraska Capitol Environs Commission (unless accepted by the applicant) shall be reviewed by the City Council, which shall consider the design board's recommendations but is not bound by them in deciding whether to modify or waive any of the Downtown Design Standards. If the Council approves a project, it shall be deemed to be consistent with the standards for purposes of issuing a building permit. Should Council affirm changes recommended by staff or Urban Design Committee, the Historic Preservation Commission, or the Nebraska Capitol Environs, the applicant shall make such changes prior to resubmitting the building permit application.

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