

Lincoln
Downtown
Neighborhood
Design
Standards

DRAFT
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*Note: Add map of B4& O1 areas
with Haymarket Landmark District &
Capitol Environs District overlay*

Chapter 3.xx

LINCOLN DOWNTOWN NEIGHBORHOOD 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 Downtown Neighborhood Design Standards (Downtown NDS) 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 hopefully will encourage some of the best practices and discourage certain negative design features, thereby strengthening Lincoln's essential center.

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).

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

Section 3. APPLICATION AND REVIEW PROCESS

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

- If a project is within the Capitol Environs District or a designated landmark area (such as Haymarket), the Downtown NDS review is conducted by the Nebraska Capitol Environs Commission (NCEC) or Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) respectively, if Commission review is required under their enabling ordinances.
- Public projects and private projects with public funding are already reviewed by the Urban Design Commission (UDC) and Downtown NDS are included in that review.
- Planning staff will review other projects and administratively approve those which meet the requirements of the Downtown NDS.
- Applicants may appeal findings of planning staff to the UDC.

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 showing the street facades and the site plan of the proposed project. 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 shall be “built-to” their front property lines (and on corner lots, shall be built-to both street frontages). Plazas and forecourts at street level shall be permitted only if the overall project is designed and located to reinforce the consistent street wall along the sidewalk. Wells Fargo Center and Education Quest Building (at the northwest and northeast corners of 13th & O Streets, respectively) offer forecourts or small plazas that meet this standard.
- b) Parking most often is provided off-site of downtown buildings. Any on-site surface parking shall be paved and must be screened to with plant materials, masonry walls, or masonry and metal (not chain-link) fences, or some combination thereof, to provide 90% screen from grade to 4 feet above the grade. Parking shall be set back six feet if only plant materials are used for screening or set back three feet if fence or wall are used; vehicles may not overhang this buffer strip. Parking between the main entrance of a building and the street is prohibited.
- c) Drive-through lanes 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 dominant exterior material for downtown buildings. Ample windows are allowed but glass curtain wall structures are not. 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 metal is prohibited for downtown buildings.
 3. Concrete block is prohibited as the primary material on street facades downtown.
 4. Synthetic stuccos are prohibited below the second story level.
- b) Parking structures and lots:
 1. Parking structures shall be designed with active-use ground-floor spaces along O, P, or Q Streets, and on N. 12th, N. 13th, and N. 21st Street between O and Q 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 set back at least 10 feet from parapet walls and architecturally screened with materials consistent with the main walls of the building, if visible from a right-of-way within 400 feet.
- d) Entrances and windows:
 1. Building entrances shall face 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 on O, P, or Q Streets, and on N. 12th, N. 13th, and N. 21st Street between O and Q 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.
3. Ramps for accessibility added to existing buildings, shall employ materials and design features drawn from the main structure. New buildings shall be planned to avoid the need for exterior ramps.

4.3 Streetscape/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 Neighborhood 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 Neighborhood 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 Director may be appealed within 14 days of the mailing (postmark) date to the Urban Design Commission by a letter filed with the City Clerk. The UDC shall review the proposed design and any additional information, and shall make a written finding upholding or reversing the administrative decision. The UDC may find a design compatible that varies from specific design standards, but meets the overall intent of the Downtown Neighborhood Design Standards. If the UDC upholds an administrative finding that a design is not compatible, the UDC may recommend changes to the proposed building permit application in order to meet the intent and purpose of the Downtown Neighborhood Design Standards.

Findings and actions of the Urban Design Commission, the Historic Preservation Commission, or the Nebraska Capitol Environs Commission may be appealed within 14 (fourteen) days to the City Council by a letter filed with the City Clerk. The City Council shall review the Commission's recommendations in considering the request to modify or waive any of the Downtown Neighborhood Design Standards. If the Council approves a waiver(s) to these standards, the applicant shall resubmit the building plans for building permit review. Should Council affirm changes recommended by staff or UDC, HPC, or NCEC, the applicant shall make such changes prior to resubmitting the building permit application.

DESIGN STANDARDS CHECKLIST

Project Location:

Applicant Name:

Applicant phone:

email:

address:

Submission Date:

4.1. General Requirements

Site Development

- a) Build-to lines
- b) Parking beside or behind, well-screened
- c) No drive-thru lanes in front of buildings

4.2. General Requirements

Materials

- a.1) Durable masonry materials
- a.2) Prohibited sidings
- 2.3) No concrete block as primary facade material
- a.4) No synthetic stucco on first story

Parking Structures

- b.1) Provide active ground-floor spaces on specified streets
- b.2) Screen any ground floor parking
- b.3) Minimize curb-cuts, vehicular/pedestrian conflict points
- b.4) Conceal sloped floors or ramps

Roofs

- c.1) Low-pitch or flat roofs
- c.2) Conceal rooftop mechanical equipment

Entrances and windows

- d.1) Entries facing street
- d.2) 70% transparent first floors on N. 12th, N. 13th, N. 21st, O, P, and Q Street frontages
- d.3) Well-designed, well-integrated accessibility features

4.3 Streetscape & Pedestrian

- a) Minimize garage doors and service bays off sidewalks
- b) Sidewalk cafes and street furniture located to maintain clear pedestrian routes
- c) Locate and screen dumpsters and other necessary functions to minimize pedestrian impacts

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