

URBAN DESIGN COMMITTEE

MEMO

APPLICATION TYPE Advisory Review

HEARING DATE September 1, 2026

ADDITIONAL MEETINGS

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Summary of Request

Downtown Design Standards have been in place since 2008 and have contributed to the downtown experience for Lincoln residents, employees, and visitors. The 2026 update recognizes new construction materials and trends that will continue to help create welcoming, high-quality places for the next generation of growth. Goals of the update aim to:

- Ensure consistent and durable materials beyond just the first 20 feet of the building
- Establish clear and cohesive color and material palettes
- Establish transparency levels at the sidewalk level
- Limit long blank walls
- Allow glass curtain wall construction in the first 20 feet of the building
- Design and construct projects with a life expectancy beyond 50 years

A staff working group consisting of members from Urban Development, Planning and Development Services, and the Mayor's Office convened over several weeks to develop and discuss the updates. Three members of the Urban Design Committee were then engaged over several weeks to further refine the proposal.

What is Changing

Materials & Facades Durable, consistent materials required across full façade—not just the first 20 feet. Ground floor windows must be highly transparent; blank walls capped at 20 feet unless softened with architectural detail or landscaping.	Entrances Every building gets one clear, street-facing main entrance—shared by everyone. No separate side doors for accessibility; ramps and access are built into the front door experience.
Parking Structures Garages that face public streets wrap their ground floor in active space or design for future conversion from parking stalls to active space.	Bicycle Parking Establish bike parking standards for residential and non-residential uses.
Landscaping & Streetscape Require shade trees to break up long parking rows; install sidewalks and street trees alongside larger projects.	Sustainability Require EV ready parking spaces for larger parking facilities. Encourage energy-efficient design and deconstruction of buildings.

This memo is organized to show proposed changes to the design standards. Each section of the Downtown Design Standards draft is included below and highlights the updated requirements on which staff request the Urban Design Committee's guidance and feedback.

Building Features

The table below is a new addition to the design standards and shows permitted and prohibited materials within the Downtown Design Standards Area.

Status	Material	Standard / Requirement	Additional Notes
Existing	Faux brick AND STONE (not made of fired clay)	Prohibited	Applies to all building elevations.
Existing	Plain or painted concrete block	Conditional	Permitted on alley-facing or secondary facades not visible from public streets.
Existing	Cast-in-place concrete	Permitted	Cast in place - plain or specialty finishes are permitted.
Existing	Stucco	Permitted	Permitted as primary material. Must be cementitious stucco with a minimum thickness of 7/8 inch.
Existing	Lap or shingle siding of any material, including wood, vinyl, cementitious, or Painted or corrugated metal	Prohibited	Applies to all building elevations.
New	Vinyl Siding and Windows	Prohibited	Applies to all building elevations.
New	Composite cladding (Fiber-Cement, Concrete composite, or other composite panels)	Permitted	Must be through-body color, low-maintenance, high-density makeup. Permitted as primary material.
New	Split-face CMU blocks	Permitted	Permitted up to 20 ft.
New	Masonry and Stone	Permitted	Must be full-depth and appropriately scaled to the building. Thin stone or brick veneer may be allowed in some secondary facades and would be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.
New	Metal cladding	Conditional	Finishes below 20 feet must be non-reflective or low-gloss. Metal panels shall be approved on a case-by-case basis. Corrugated metal is prohibited. When used, metal panels shall use concealed fasteners.
New	Curtain walls	Conditional	Mirrored or highly reflective glass is prohibited below 20 feet. Minimum VTR/VLT 0.45 (45%) below 20 feet.

			Fritted glass or similar applied treatments that reduce transparency are not allowed below 20 feet.
Revised	EIFS (Exterior Insulation Finish System)	Conditional	May be permitted above 20 feet with limitations. Permitted only as a secondary material.
Revised	Precast concrete wall panels with embedded thin brick facings	Permitted	Permitted as primary or secondary materials.

Additional new building or revised building standards:

Standard	Notes
Exterior façades may incorporate up to three cladding materials and three colors (part of the building envelope). However, a simpler palette using fewer materials is preferred. Glass is only counted when used as a curtain wall, and added accessories are excluded from this material count.	New. Limits the number of cladding materials to three.
On primary and non-primary facades, material articulation shall be considered as a cohesive surface from the ground plane to the roof eave or parapet, avoiding abrupt changes without coherent transitions. Durable materials must be applied across all façades.	New. This standard removes the requirement for durable materials only up to 20 feet and instead a cohesive design of durable materials across the entire building.
When multiple materials or colors are used, they should follow a clear hierarchy of primary, secondary, and accent elements, and maintain a consistent palette across all facades to ensure a cohesive appearance from all angles.	New. Limits the number of overall colors.
Glazing may have solar control; however, ground floor spaces are required to have a high degree of transparency to provide a visual connection to the adjacent public space (minimum 0.45 (45%) VTR/VLT). In mixed-use developments, front doors of retail or pedestrian-oriented ground-floor uses must include clear glass openings.	New. Clarifies that clearer glass needs to be provided at street level but that darker glass can be used above street level for solar control.
The vertical or horizontal length of blank walls facing public streets or existing residential development shall not exceed 20 feet, except where required for functional building elements such as stairwells, elevator shafts, or utility rooms. Any such blank walls exceeding 20 feet shall incorporate architectural articulation, or landscaping, scaled appropriately, and be consistent with the overall building design.	New.
PTACs, mini splits, louvers, and other mechanical openings are not permitted on primary facades.	New.
For mixed-use buildings with ground floor commercial, ensure that at least 70% of the first-floor frontage consists of clear glass openings and windows to create a visual connection between the street and the interior of the building.	Revised. This requirement exists in other geographic areas, and the proposal is to apply the standard across Downtown.

In commercial storefronts, display windows may be counted toward the required 70% transparency, provided they do not have blank walls or opaque surfaces immediately behind the glazing.	New.
For residential ground floor uses, ensure that all street-facing facades consist of at least 30% clear glass openings.	Revised. Other design standards allow a lower percentage of glass openings for first floor residential uses.

Parking

Standard	Notes
Parking structures shall be designed to minimize their visual and functional impact on the pedestrian environment. Where a parking structure fronts one, two, or three public streets, at least one street-facing ground-floor façade shall incorporate usable floor area (active uses) between parking areas and the public sidewalk. Where a parking structure fronts public streets on all four sides, at least two street-facing ground floor façades shall incorporate usable floor area. In areas designated by the City as having low or uncertain commercial market demand, ground-floor parking areas intended for future commercial uses shall be designed as flexible, convertible areas capable of functioning initially as either parking or active-use space and transitioning between these uses over time. Flexible design should support future conversion through appropriate floor-to-floor heights, structural capacity, and facade configurations.	Revised. Current standards only require usable floor area for parking garages located between N and Q Streets, 9th and 19th Streets, and along N. 21st Street between O and Q and along Canopy Street. The new standard provides opportunity for more discussion about current conditions and future plans for specific areas and encourages flexible design solutions.
All parking structures, regardless of the number or location of required active-use frontages, shall provide continuous weather-protection elements, such as canopies or overhangs along all public sidewalk frontages. These elements shall maintain a consistent depth and height to create a comfortable pedestrian environment and shall be designed to avoid interference with street trees, lighting and other streetscape furnishings.	New.
Where structured parking is located at the ground level along any public right-of-way and is not lined with usable floor area, visual screening shall be required. Screening may include decorative metal grilles, perforated or louvered panels, artistic or sculptural elements, green walls, or vertical landscaping systems, and shall effectively obscure views of parked vehicles from adjacent streets and sidewalks.	Revised. Current standards mention that “ground-floor parking in structures to be screened from public sidewalks”, but do not provide any specifics on what counts as screening.

Bicycle Parking a. Non-residential uses: One (1) bicycle parking space per ten thousand (10,000) square feet of floor area with a minimum of four (4) bicycle parking spaces. b. Residential uses: One (1) bicycle parking space per five (5) dwelling units, with a minimum of two (2) bicycle parking spaces. 1. All residential required bicycle parking spaces shall be covered to protect bicycles from rain, snow, and sun. 2. Bicycle parking shall be designed to allow the bicycle frame and at least one wheel to be securely locked.	New. Bike parking standards have been developed with input from the Complete Streets Committee and by referencing peer City ordinances.
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Entrances

Standard	Notes
Clearly differentiate entrances between different uses in a building. This includes access to individual units or to common lobby areas.	New.
For all street-facing entrances, provide awnings, canopies, or clearly defined recessed areas.	New.
Service bays and parking access shall not be allowed on the primary façade of the building. These elements are only allowed on secondary facades and are limited to no more than 15% of the length of the façade, or oriented toward alleys or the interior of the lot to avoid direct openings onto sidewalks. One service bay shall be permitted on the primary façade if the building has no alley access or if all facades are primary.	New.
Ramps for accessibility shall be designed so that everyone uses the same entrance, not separate “accessible” vs. “main” routes. Avoid creating the appearance of a “secondary” or less dignified entrance. For existing buildings, employ materials and design features drawn from the main structure. For new buildings, design the ramp as a seamless extension of the building’s architecture that utilizes the same or complementary materials found on the building façade and/or walkways.	Revised. Current standard says “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.”
Non-permanent ramps/stairs are not permitted.	New.

Site Development

Standard	Notes
Buildings throughout Downtown Lincoln shall be substantially “built-to” their front property lines (and on corner lots, shall be built-to both front property lines) to ensure a consistent street wall.	Revised. Currently only applies to buildings west of 19th Street and on North 21st Street from O to Q Streets.
Minimal building setbacks shall be approved on a case-by-case basis where agreed-upon site constraints are present. When building setbacks are approved, the setback space must be actively programmed. Acceptable uses in the minimal setback include: • Public plaza spaces • Outdoor seating for cafes or restaurants • Landscaped areas that enhance the pedestrian experience • Small gathering spaces with benches or other street furniture • Entry courts or building reception area.	Revised. Currently not allowed on P Street from 9th to 19th and on North 21st from O to Q.
Drive-thru facilities are prohibited within Downtown Lincoln. No expansion of existing drive-through services is permitted. This prohibition applies to all business types. As alternatives, businesses are encouraged to provide walk-up windows and bicycle-friendly service options where appropriate.	Revised. Currently only prohibited in area bounded by 10th Street, 150 feet north of P Street, 14th Street and N Street.
Parking and driveways between the building and the street are prohibited.	Revised. Current standards allow this for hotel drop off lanes and for buildings occupying an entire block face.
PUDO (Pick-Up/Drop-Off) zones will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. PUDO proposals shall demonstrate compatibility with the City’s adopted or proposed streetscape plans and shall not function as drive-thru facilities.	New.

Landscaping and Streetscape Design

Standard	Notes
In Downtown Lincoln, for parking lots visible from public streets, single rows of parking shall not exceed 10 stalls, and double rows of parking shall not exceed 20 consecutive stalls without an internal island break and a shade tree. This requirement does not apply to parking lots that meet all of the following criteria: • Total capacity less than 25 parking stalls, • Located entirely behind a building, • Not visible from any public street.	Revised. Current standards apply to parking lots 6,000 SF. The new standards also recognize an urban environment.
The Downtown streetscape standards establish a vision for streetscapes that will be realized through numerous streetscape improvement projects. Some of these improvements will be associated with private development projects while others will be initiated by the City of Lincoln or other public entities. The following are typical conditions, in excess of routine	Revised. Current South Haymarket Design Standards and the H-2 zoning district require streetscape improvements. This concept is proposed across B-4 and O-1 zoning in Downtown.

maintenance, that would likely require streetscape improvements: • A project is occurring in which the city has made or will make some financial contribution. • A project is occurring in which a portion of the streetscape area is being removed or replaced. • A major remodeling project is occurring as described in Section 2.1.b. • A street is being rehabilitated or curbs are being replaced or relocated. • A new street/streetscape is being constructed. • Integrate approved and proposed streetscape designs for public rights of way within and adjacent to the project area. Where no approved or proposed streetscape designs exist, projects are required to install sidewalks and street trees as outlined below: • Concrete sidewalks shall be constructed to the specifications set forth in Chapter 14.80 in pedestrian ways and on both sides of all streets and private roadways within the redevelopment and on the side of the streets abutting the redevelopment, except as otherwise provided in this title. • Trees shall be planted, per design standard 2.35, along both sides of all streets and private roadways within and abutting. The trees shall be planted in the public right-of-way, provided there is sufficient space, as determined by the Parks and Recreation Department, or on private property when sufficient public right-of-way isn't available. Healthy trees shall be preserved wherever possible.	
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Sustainability Elements

Standard	Notes
Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Infrastructure – These requirements apply to new parking lots and structures or major renovations to existing parking areas, as defined by these standards. • Parking areas with twenty (20) or more off-street parking spaces shall be required to comply with EV-ready requirements. • Parking areas with fewer than twenty (20) off-street parking spaces are exempt from the requirements of this section. For parking areas subject to this section, a minimum of twenty percent (20%) of all off-street parking spaces shall be EV-ready. EV-ready spaces shall include:	New. Proposed standards were coordinated with the Chief Sustainability Officer.

• Installed conduit from the electrical room or service panel to each designated parking space; • Reserved electrical panel capacity sufficient to support future EV charging equipment; and • Space allocated for future meters or sub-meters where required.	
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