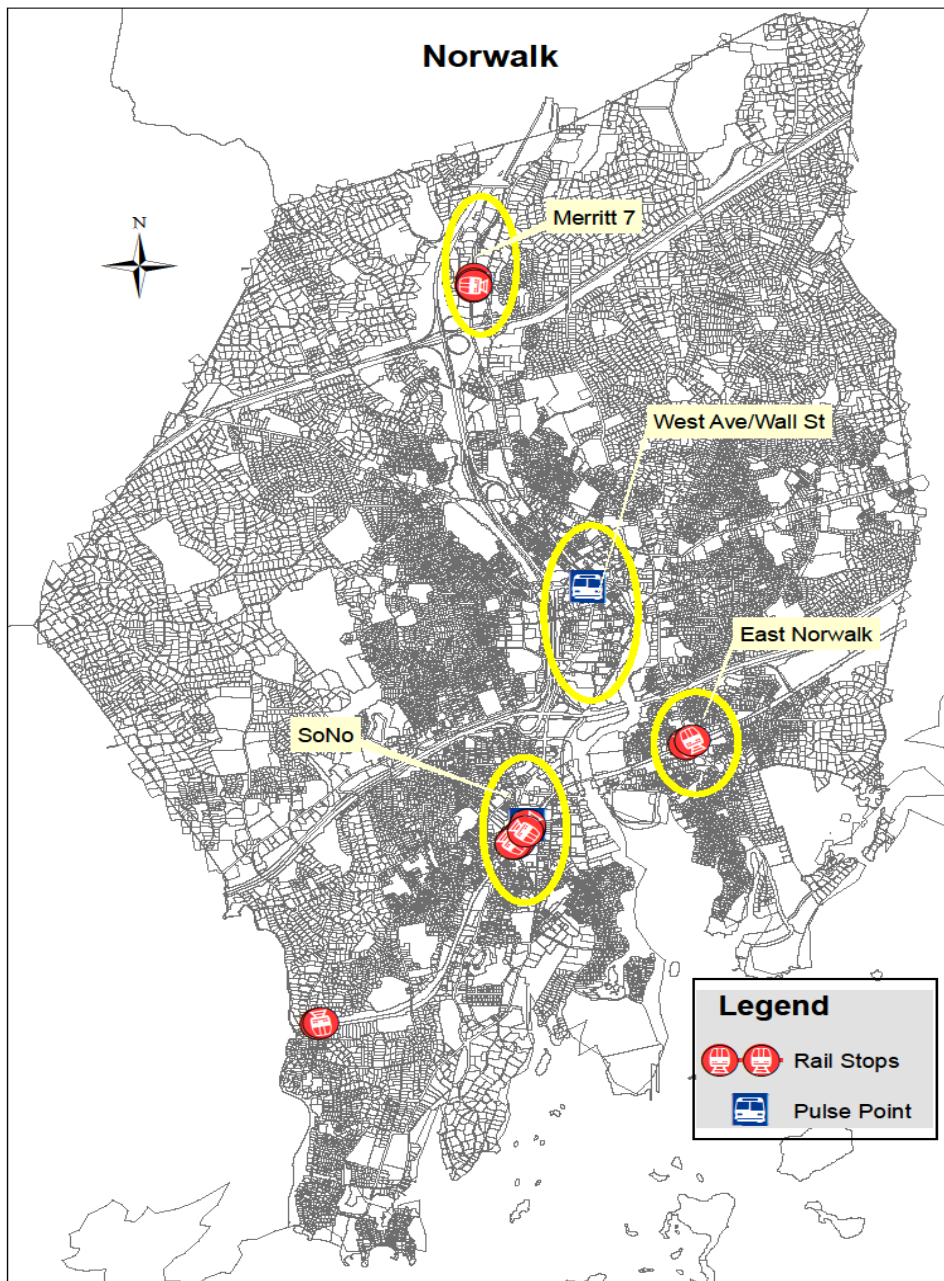


# WEBSTER STREET BLOCK DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES AND DESIGN GUIDELINES

## Introduction

Consistent with the recommendations within the 2020 Citywide Plan, the City of Norwalk seeks to maximize the development potential in and around our transit nodes. To realize this goal, the City has taken proactive steps to rezone several areas around its transit nodes:

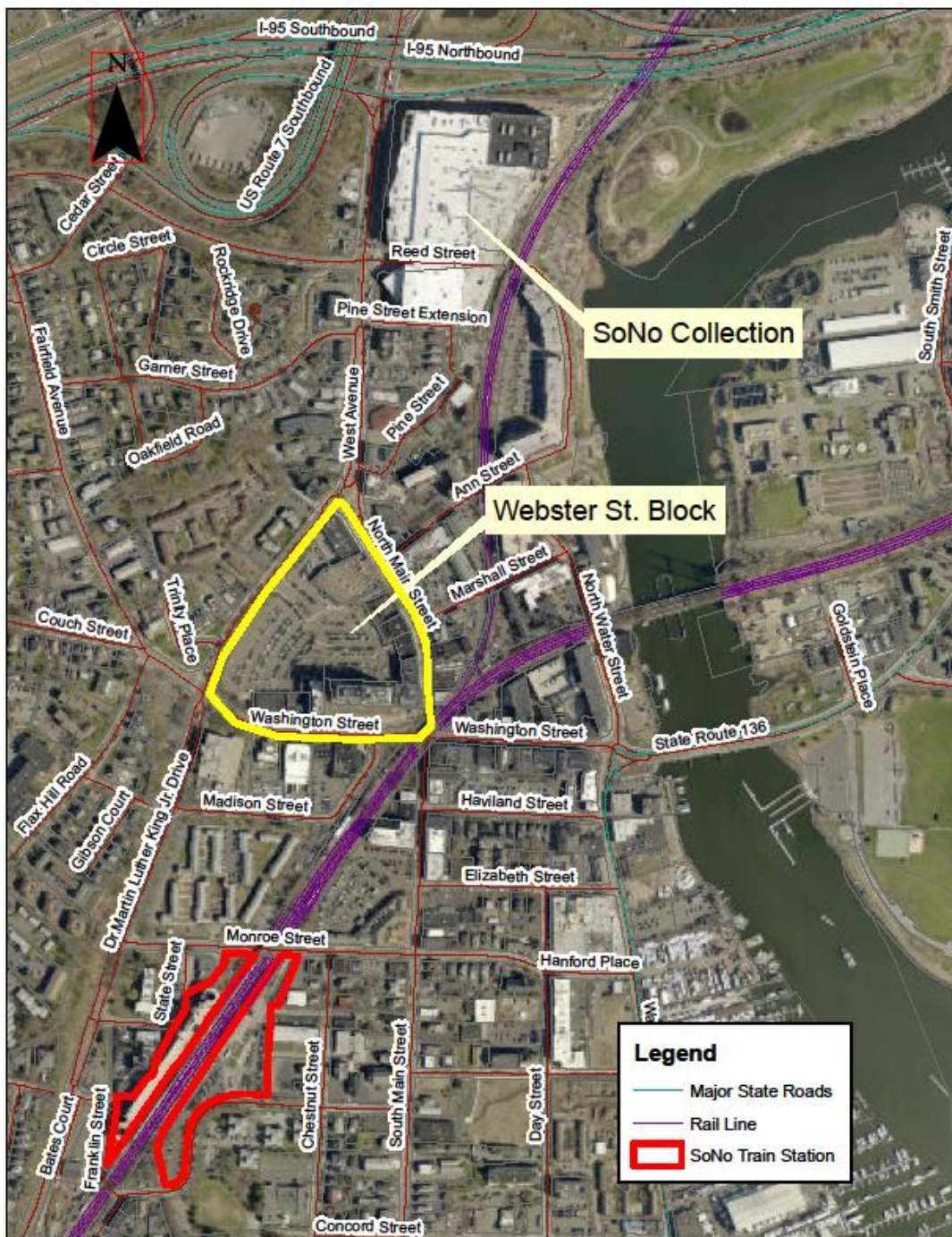
- 2018 – rezoned over 50 acres near the South Norwalk Train Station,
- 2019 – rezoned over 100 acres on the West Avenue/Wall Street corridor,
- 2020 – anticipated completion of East Norwalk TOD plan and commensurate rezoning,



*The Webster Street Block (The Block), located in historic South Norwalk (SoNo), provides a significant*

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TOD development opportunity. The City envisions *The Block* being developed at a higher-density and including commercial, residential, and institutional uses to be complimented by pedestrian-oriented retail and business services, and compatible boutique manufacturing. Parking will be located within a single structured parking facility or in multiple facilities on the site and will be developed in a manner that minimizes surface parking. Existing parking will be replaced one-for-one, while the requisite number of spaces required by zoning for the new development will also be provided. The City may also seek to include additional commuter parking capacity for the South Norwalk Train Station.



## Project Goals

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In dynamic commercial centers, changes in tenancy and use are expected over time. Therefore, any changes in zoning and design guidelines are intended to be responsive to changing market conditions, while maintaining high standards for building design and construction. As such, development review is concerned foremost with appropriateness of building design and broad categories of uses, the major purposes of which are to:

- Facilitate development that can accommodate a variety of uses, contribute to a vibrant business environment, and encourages street-level activity;
- Grow the local tax base through increased real estate investment and intensive, higher-density commercial development;
- Create new jobs at a variety of income and skill levels;
- Redevelop vacant or underutilized land at a density appropriate for the site and surrounding context;
- Replace incompatible and environmentally unsound uses with compatible mixed-use development;
- Provide affordable housing units consistent with the requirements enacted as part of the South Norwalk and West Avenue/Wall Street rezoning; and
- Encourage sustainable development and the use of green building standards.

Today, the approximately 5-acre City-owned surface parking lot (*The Lot*) on the *Webster Street Block* exists as a sea of parking largely lined by the backs of commercial buildings. This is the introduction that most visitors receive when parking in *The Lot* or approaching SoNo from Fairfield Avenue. In addition to views of large expanses of asphalt, users are presented with views of dumpsters, air conditioning equipment, loading areas, and litter. Views from the parking lot to Dr. Martin Luther King MLK Drive (MLK), on the other hand, include an expanse of landscaping and a mix of older Victorian houses and newer multifamily residential structures.

A lack of actively-used street-level spaces around the parking lot make it feel "deserted" at night, even when full of parked cars. Both day and night, the main connecting driveway between Washington Street and MLK Drive can pose safety issues for crossing pedestrians.

The pedestrian way next to the Bow Tie Cinema is generally the most visible and inviting walkway out of the lot. A restaurant opening on one side helps to make the walkway feel "safe" and welcoming. However, this route leads most directly to destinations along North Main Street. To get to Washington Street, the most direct routes are either through an alleyway next to North Main Street, or the parking entrance next to 17 Washington Street. The alleyway to North Main Street has very low visibility from the lot, making it appear dark and feel "unsafe." The driveway next to 17 Washington Street is visible from the lot, but presents safety issues as pedestrians must maneuver around electrical transformers and cars entering *The Lot*. Another pedestrian way to the west end of Washington Street exists adjacent to the retail building located at 9 Washington Street. This path can be used by Post Office customers, people going to the branch library, or the customers of stores at the end of the block.

The newly renovated park at the corner of Washington and North Main Street is an important resource for SoNo. Stretching from the corner of North Main Street and Washington Streets to the alleyway at 17 Washington Street, this generous plaza is designed to be an attractive urban amenity.

In summary, the user experience within *The Lot* as a parking facility or exiting by foot can be confusing,

## WEBSTER STREET BLOCK DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES AND DESIGN GUIDELINES

feel "unsafe" in places, lead to pedestrian and car conflicts, and present a negative image. As a connection between the SoNo district and a significant parking resource, *The Lot* does not provide an even level of access across its different points of entry and egress. Finally, the public park at the corner of North Main and Washington Streets represents an important opportunity for improving public engagement with the entire southeast corner of the Webster Street Block.

The *South Norwalk TOD Redevelopment Plan* envisions the *Webster Street Block* as a higher-density sub-district within South Norwalk. The redevelopment of *The Lot* may provide the most significant site-specific economic development opportunity within the area, while also positioned to minimize impacts to the already established surrounding neighborhoods. This site is intended to advance a development plan that furthers the City's stated goal of improving its urban commercial tax base, while adding a variety of high paying and living wage jobs. Considering the City's objectives, development ought to be primarily dedicated to a complementary blend of office and residential development that is contextually aligned with the neighboring historic structures and other development surrounding the site. To accompany higher density development, the provision of new, and investment in existing, public open space is expected as part of the development plan.

Parking that serves the public and the private development can either be separated or shared. As the project is being constructed, a minimum of 50% of the existing parking spaces must remain in service at any given time. Any spaces taken out of service must be put back into service within a twenty-four (24) month period.

A successful development concept for the *Webster Street Block* will embrace the following developmental goals:

1. Increase the city's grand list and maximize the local value capture of the real estate investment;
2. Foster a development culture to maximize job growth;
3. Meet parking demand for the existing users, the proposed development, and additional demands such as commuter parking;
4. Improve pedestrian, vehicle, and multimodal circulation through and around the site;
5. Improve the visual quality of the site and surrounding block through high-quality planning, design, and construction;
6. Strategically locate new multi-family housing and/or office on the site as primary uses;
7. Break down the scale of the existing block and visually and physically reconnect it to the built fabric and character of SoNo; and
8. Pursue a phased development that allows existing parking demands to be met throughout the redevelopment process and cater to any market changes.

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## Development Parameters

The City anticipates the following land uses being considered as part of a redevelopment proposal on the *Webster Street Block*:

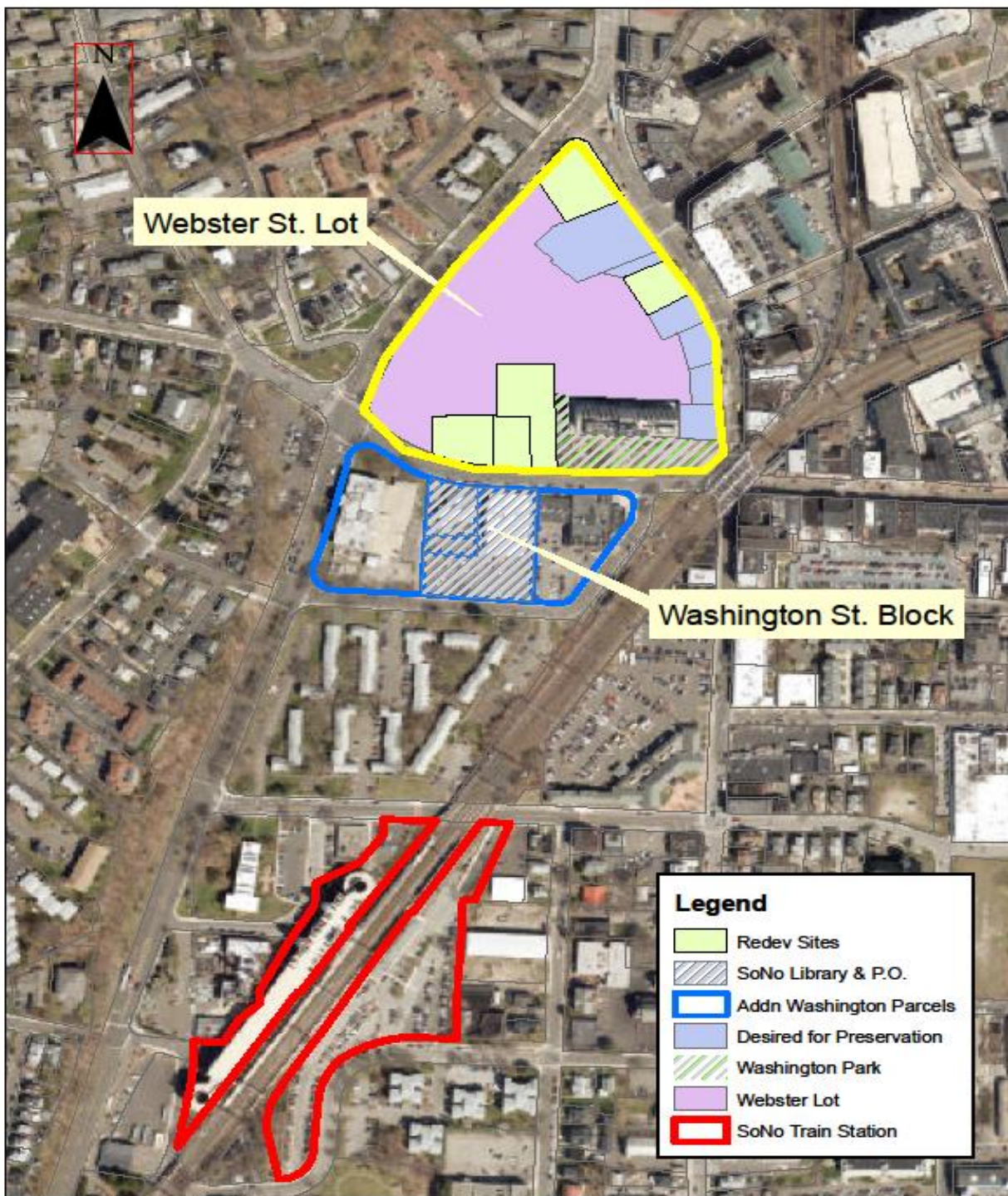
- A. Office
- B. Arts
- C. Institutional and Educational
- D. Residential Multi-Family
- E. Retail and Service
- F. Boutique Manufacturing / R&D
- G. Restaurant / Bar
- H. Public Realm

Developers should understand that the City is seeking a development that maximizes job growth and increases the grand list, while contributing to an 18-hour per day, live-work-play environment. Complimentary allowable uses are intended to create the street level energy desired from the development. Developers must demonstrate an ability to respond to and provide for market conditions and produce real estate assets that accommodate current and anticipated future demand. Proposed developments ought to include a mix of uses supported by market demand and compatible with existing land uses.

The City will consider proposals to rezone *The Lot* in order to facilitate a preferred development scheme and will seek to incorporate that zoning onto the entire *Webster Street Block*. Rezoning's impacts on and applicability to the *Washington Street Block* and properties to the south should also be considered (see the map on page 6).

## Zoning Considerations

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## Site Plan Considerations

There shall be continuous pedestrian connections between all major points of activity within the Development Site, including, but not limited to, connections to all public and private ways abutting the Development Site and any transit stops. Development(s) shall support improved access to surrounding neighborhoods by means of sidewalk connections, crosswalks, landscaping, traffic signalization, and traffic calming methods as appropriate.

To promote pedestrian activity, buildings shall be designed with separate front entrance doors to lobbies, cultural spaces, retail and business, and other sources of patron activity. These entrances shall be oriented to existing or proposed public sidewalks, paths, and other open space (as opposed to a central "mall" entrance).

Parking and loading areas shall be hidden from view from public ways. Parking shall not face the street edge(s) of the parcel and shall be suitably screened both visually and acoustically from the street and abutters (sufficient to conform to the City's Noise Ordinance during operation). Parking structures shall contribute to, and not obstruct, pedestrian activity in the vicinity. The exterior facade shall maintain a horizontal line throughout; the sloping interior necessary in parking structures shall not be repeated on the exterior facade. A wall or other screening of sufficient height and depth to screen parked vehicles and create a visually pleasing character shall be provided. Any views into parking structures shall be minimized through use of landscaping or architectural treatment.

Applications shall include a *Parking Optimization Plan* illustrating how management and pricing strategies will encourage shared use and reasonable turnover of parking spaces and discourage structures' use as "Park and Ride" facilities for Metro North.

Ground level mechanical equipment, utility and trash enclosures, loading docks, and other utilitarian and service elements shall not abut the street edge(s) of the parcel and shall be visually and acoustically screened (sufficient to conform to the City's Noise Ordinance during operation). Access to these areas shall not interrupt pedestrian and sidewalk treatments. The City may limit the hours of truck deliveries in order to minimize any adverse impacts that loading may have on the surrounding neighborhood. Generally, loading times should take local traffic patterns into consideration.

Lighting shall be appropriate to the historic and pedestrian-oriented character of surrounding neighborhoods and buildings and shall enhance safety and security while minimizing glare and light trespass.

# WEBSTER STREET BLOCK DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES AND DESIGN GUIDELINES

## General Design Guidelines for Webster Street Development

These guidelines are not intended to inhibit design creativity or discourage innovative architectural design solutions. They are intended to provide the general standards for building massing, siting, and articulation. It is understood that Buildings and Structures may not be able to comply with all of the following Guidelines.

1. Building(s) should complete the street wall along the primary street edge(s).
2. Massing and height of the building should be articulated in a manner compatible with the physical character of the surrounding districts, particularly where a building abuts a pre-existing low rise or historically designated property. Whenever possible, the traditional variety in the scale, rhythm, and relationship of buildings to pedestrian public ways should be included in the new developments.
3. A transition in height should be established where new development adjoins low-rise pre-existing development or historically designated properties.
4. Thirty-foot-wide commercial bays with independent entrances onto the street are typical in SoNo and should be repeated in new developments to create visual and pedestrian interest. Flat facades should be avoided through the use of recessed or projected entryways, bays, canopies, awnings, residential balconies on upper stories, and other architectural elements. Non-residential ground floor facades should have a minimum of 75% transparent material, and second floor facades should have a minimum of 40% transparent material. These openings should provide views into the building and should not be blocked by interior storage, non-artistic displays, or greater than 30% internally mounted signage. Compliance or noncompliance with this guideline must be documented dimensional tables included with architectural drawing sets.
5. Exterior building materials for all visible portions of the building should be high quality, durable, and aesthetically appropriate. Particular attention should be paid where properties abut historically designated property. Predominant exterior building materials should include an appropriate combination of brick, glass, wood, artistically used metal, stone, or stucco. Precast concrete panels, EIFS-type finishes, and large expanses of glass or corrugated sheet metal are discouraged.
6. Bare or painted concrete as the only exterior facade material is not allowed.
7. Visible rear and side facades should maintain a similar character to the front facade of the building and the intended character of the surrounding district (though non-primary facades may be simplified).
8. Signage design should respect building context and be oriented to pedestrians. To add interest and character to the pedestrian environment, variety in size, location, and illumination of signs is encouraged.
9. Major entrances should be located on public streets and at or near corners wherever possible. Entrances should relate well to crosswalks and pathways that lead to bus stops and transit stations.
10. Buildings should have a clearly expressed base, middle, and top. This may be achieved through changes in material, fenestration, architectural detailing, or other elements. Taller buildings should be articulated to avoid a monolithic appearance.
11. The facade below the Tapering Height should exhibit a human scale through design elements such as changes in plane, and variety or contrast in form, color, and materials. Architectural elements and setbacks should be used to break up long facades and avoid large areas of



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undifferentiated or blank building facades.

12. Building elements located above the Tapering Height should be designed to limit impacts from visual massing, obstruction of views, and creation of shadows on public open space, or public ways. Where practical, the width and depth of these elements should be limited to 120 feet and where more than one element exists a minimum separation of 50 feet is encouraged.
13. All rooftop building systems, including wireless communications facilities, should be incorporated into the building form in a manner integral to the building architecture, including screening with materials that harmonize with the buildings' exterior finishes.
14. A sidewalk depth of at least fifteen (15) feet from the street curb to building with a minimum 5 ft. clearance is required for portions of the project that front on major streets is desirable.
15. On-site, off-street parking into the site should be accessed from the east side of the site.
16. Above ground structured parking should be lined with active uses (shops, cafes, etc.) along major public streets. Upper levels and facades along smaller public streets shall be screened and include architectural design elements such as windows, bays, etc. such that the space's use for parking are not immediately apparent. Large horizontal openings are strongly discouraged. Direct pedestrian access to the street and/or to public areas within the site should be provided by all garages serving non-residential uses.
17. Usable public realm space should be located to support public gathering. To the extent possible, usable open space should be designed to appear as an extension of existing public space, through consistency in design and materials. The provision of an interconnected series of open space to support pedestrian movement is encouraged.
18. Installation of public art is encouraged in order to add visual interest and distinguishing features to landscaped or other public areas.
19. Utilities and wiring shall be placed below ground. Transformers and trash facilities may also be required to be located underground.
20. Green Building techniques shall be a significant component of the project. Some examples of green infrastructure include (green roofs, solar panels, rain gardens, and geothermal heating and cooling).