Town Centre Design Guidelines

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As per Policy 8J of the Official Community Plan, the City of White Rock Town Centre Design Guidelines have been devised to help implement sustainable urban form by providing direction and guidance for development. These Design Guidelines will enable the existing Town Centre to develop into a mature, attractive and cohesive centre.

The Town Centre Design Guidelines intend to encourage responsible development. Most well-planned municipalities have similar guidelines to protect the interests of residents and businesses and to develop and protect downtown areas by fostering a comfortable and attractive environment for users. Accessible building design must be provided in accordance with the Development Permit Area Guidelines of the Official Community Plan.

These guidelines are structured to provide clear guidance for future development in the Town Centre using diagrams and text. The photographs in each section should be viewed as examples that illustrate design concepts rather than suggest specific developments. The Town Centre Design Guidelines are meant to be understood as guiding principles and not precise design directives. Artistic license is granted to those who wish to offer creative and innovative developments to the City of White Rock. Applications to develop within the Town Centre should conform to the intent of the Design Guidelines, but variance may be allowed in consultation with the City Planning department.

The values to be considered are:

- Economic Vitality
- Accessibility
- Safety
- Diversity
- Unique Character
- Sustainability
- Livability
- Aesthetics
**CREATE MIXED-USE, DENSE DEVELOPMENT**

**Issue**
With guidance, mixed-use and density can increase variety and vitality in the White Rock Town Centre, which will enhance safety by reducing unpopulated, unused areas. Density will result in a walkable area where people live, shop and work without needing to commute. The encouragement of dense development in the Town Centre will also redirect the focus of growth away from the periphery, concentrating use in an area with existing infrastructure and services. Desirable Town Centre commercial uses include high-tech business, retail and restaurants.

There will be a commercial/retail focus on the main Town Centre streets and mixed-use on the east and west edges of the Town Centre area, in compliance with Policy 8M of the OCP.

**Values Supported**
- Economic Vitality
- Unique Character
- Safety
- Diversity
- Sustainability

**Guidelines**
- North Bluff Road, Johnston Road, Russell Avenue and Thrift Avenue will have a primarily commercial ground floor focus. Martin Street, Foster Street and George Street will have a primarily residential ground floor focus.
APPROPRIATE BUILDING FORM AND SITING

Issue
Appropriate building location and form gives definition to streets and open spaces, and has a great impact on the usability, comfort and visual appeal of these places.

Values Supported
- Livability
- Aesthetics
- Unique Character

Streetscape ideas from the 2001 Town Centre Design Charrette

Recommendations
- Base building heights should be appropriate to an urban centre, and should provide definition to streets and open spaces. A base building height of two to four storeys is considered appropriate.
- Taller building elements (above four storeys in height) should be located on the site in accordance with the following guidelines and principles:
  i) the angle of containment in Appendix B, and the Official Community Plan
  ii) regard for the location of existing buildings
  iii) regard for microclimate on streets and open spaces
  iv) ocean views

As required in the OCP, such developments will need to be supported by development approval information including view corridors, lighting (sun/shade), and wind conditions.

Building section and open space ideas from the 2001 Town Centre Design Charrette
**PROTECT THE PEDESTRIAN WHERE THE BUILDING MEETS THE STREET**

**Issue**
Since pedestrians are an essential part of the vitality of White Rock's Town Centre, their comfort is important. This involves planning for weather protection from wind, rain and sun. Town Centre pedestrians will use the most comfortable route, avoiding blocks that are less comfortable or that create gaps in the continuity of protection.

Street overshadowing by buildings in mid-winter should be minimized to maintain the attractiveness of the pedestrian environment.

**Values Supported**
- Economic Vitality
- Accessibility
- Character
- Livability

**Guidelines**
- A continuous overhead cover offering adequate pedestrian protection should be provided along 100% of all commercial frontages.
- Applicants must provide shadow-influence diagrams with development proposals. See Appendix A for details on shadowing and sun angles.
- Buildings on corners should be setback a minimum of 3m or significantly more on Johnston Road where open space or plazas are to be provided.
- Ground floor setbacks should be 1.5m on Johnston Road to provide adequate sidewalk space for comfortable pedestrian movement. Setbacks on other streets should be a minimum of 1.5m to provide space for sidewalk cafes, landscaping, pedestrian seating areas, etc.
- Way-finding tools such as specialty pavement, signs and graphics should be provided to facilitate pedestrian movement.
**Provide Active and Continuous Frontage**

**Issue**
Active frontages are a necessary part of White Rock’s Town Centre because they define streets and public spaces as areas of high activity and commercial value. Outdoor café extensions, retail frontage, pedestrian amenities such as plazas, parks, landscaping, benches and windows facing the street are all part of active frontage. Gaps in frontage, blank walls or parking at the building façade are not active frontages. A gap in the length of facades will create an area of low activity and low commercial potential in the same way a vacant lot will, and should be avoided whenever possible.

**Values Supported**
- Economic Vitality
- Aesthetics

**Guidelines**
- Building and frontage design should provide a continuous, protected and attractive area for Town Centre patrons.
- Building elevations that are visible from adjoining or nearby streets or pedestrian ways should be treated as a ‘front’ elevation so that buildings do not turn their backs upon adjoining public ways. These elevation treatments do not have to be as extensive as the building’s true front, but can be improved by architectural details, screening and landscaping for example.
- Buildings should provide street-level, pedestrian-oriented uses on all street fronts.
- Fascia-type signage or hanging signage is encouraged.
**Issue**
At street level, buildings come into close contact with pedestrians and other sidewalk users. Up close, we get much more information about a design or material than we can when it is high above the street. Since people tend to attribute to a city attitudes projected by its primary buildings, careful attention must be paid to ensuring that the design and materials used in White Rock’s buildings at street level are appropriate. If the Town Centre is well designed and built, the city will seem comfortable, interesting and vital.

It is important that the materials and construction of buildings in the Town Centre, at least on the lower floors, provide a level of detail and quality that is comfortable to the pedestrian. Human scale must also be considered when designing a building suitable for the Town Centre. This can be achieved by variation in the three dimensional character of the building mass in mid-to higher-rise buildings. ‘Slab’ style vertical extrusions of a maximum building footprint are strongly discouraged.

**Values Supported**
Unique Character
Livability
Economic Vitality
Accessibility

**Guidelines**
- Buildings must be sympathetic to the pedestrian environment, avoiding impersonal facades, especially at pedestrian levels. This includes sensitive proportioning and dimensioning of building elements, appropriate choice and use of materials, detailing, textures, colours, lighting, street furniture and signage.
- Taller buildings should leave more space at the street level and not occupy the maximum lot space possible. The base of the building may be set back or articulated to achieve open space objectives on the site.
- The facades of taller buildings should acknowledge the scale of the surrounding area. Buildings should step back:
  - at the 3 storey level to meet the angle of containment;
  - at the rear of the building at 3 storey intervals, or provide horizontal articulation at 3 storey intervals.
PROVIDE GENEROUS STREET-LEVEL WINDOWS

Issue
Windowless walls prohibiting a visual connection between the inside of a building and the sidewalk are strongly discouraged. They do not promote ‘active frontage’, or transparency of facades contributing to the interaction between building and pedestrian street traffic. Windows not only create a feeling of openness, they also instill in people on the street the feeling they could be assisted if there was a problem. Street-level windows also facilitate visual continuity along commercial streets. Internal blinds or drapes should be avoided because they create a ‘blank wall’ façade.

Values Supported
Safety
Livability
Economic Vitality

Guidelines
- Street facing, ground-level facades should be highly transparent (minimum 50-75% windows or fixed glass) designed to make the inside easily discernible to the passer-by. The use of reflective and highly tinted glass is discouraged.
- Second floor facades should be transparent as well but need only maintain a minimum of 30-50% area of window or fixed glass.
Issue
As density increases in the Town Centre, parking requirements will likely increase and should be planned for and developed as an integral component of a successful city core. Acknowledging that the mainly pedestrian-oriented Town Centre will include external access from buses and will have a significant resident population, those using personal vehicles also need to be accommodated. However, parking areas can have negative impacts on the fabric of the Town Centre and we must pay special attention to the potential conflicts they can create. The problem with parking areas is not what they create – useful storage for cars – but what they tend to displace – pedestrian-oriented street-level activity and multiple-uses per block.

Values Supported
Accessibility
Diversity
Economic Vitality
Aesthetics

Guidelines
- Access to parking for new developments must not be from Johnston Road unless there are no lanes or side streets or other alternatives available.
- All new parking should be below grade (underground). It should not occur at grade along property lines that are adjacent to a street at the ground level.
- Access points should be carefully designed and located to minimize pedestrian conflicts and to support the objectives of active and continuous building frontage.
CREATE QUALITY, RESPONSIBLE DEVELOPMENT

Issue
Well-built buildings help to attract and retain tenants, hold their economic value longer and can help the economic viability of the whole White Rock Town Centre. Property can be affected by the value of adjacent property, and as poor quality buildings age, the value of neighboring buildings may decrease. Poor building methods also impact movement around the building when reconstruction or repairs are taking place, hindering commercial and other activity within the Town Centre.

The City supports the use of ‘green’ practices in any new Town Centre developments. As per policy 13G of the OCP, the City encourages the design and construction of buildings that are energy efficient and environmentally sound. Planted roofs should be considered for all Town Centre buildings – they reduce stormwater runoff and are attractive. The use of recycled materials in construction, the use of a renewable energy source and other environmentally sound technologies contribute to the sustainability of the Town Centre and are cost effective.

‘Aging-in-place’ is a concept that promotes the option of residing in the same place despite experiencing changes in health or mobility as one ages. New developments should facilitate changes that are required by residents with varying or changing needs, thereby supporting aging-in-place.

Values Supported
Sustainability
Livability
Economic Vitality
Aesthetics

Guidelines
- A high quality of architectural design is encouraged.
- Buildings should be designed and built as long-term components (100 years) of the Town Centre and should be constructed with high quality materials.
- Buildings should incorporate "green building" features or attributes, such as planted roofs.
- All new multi-family housing developments should support an aging-in-place built environment.
BUFFER NEIGHBORHOOD EDGES

Issue
Residential developments existing in the White Rock Town Centre and its periphery contribute to the overall vitality of the core. This residential character needs to be considered in the design and planning of adjacent commercial development. The scale, height, setback, detailing and massing of adjacent commercial buildings should consider surrounding residential uses.

Values Supported
Livability
Safety
Diversity

Guidelines
- Building siting should facilitate the transition to medium density residential neighborhoods; setbacks on Martin Street should be 4.5 m as a transition to the residential zone to the west.
- Street-level landscaping and design features should provide a clear distinction between public and private space, provide privacy and a safe and attractive pedestrian environment.
- See Appendix B for angles of containment.
PROVIDE LIGHTING ALONG PEDESTRIAN ROUTES

Issue
In addition to providing safety and security, street lighting acts as a unifying streetscape element. Lighting discourages crime and creates an environment that feels safe. The size and scale of lights and light poles will affect the character of the streetscape, and can create the sense that the Town Centre is the domain of the pedestrian.

Values Supported
Livability
Character
Safety

Guidelines
- Streets and publicly accessible spaces should be lit by pedestrian-scaled fixtures emitting warm light, either on poles or attached to the face of buildings. The type and size of pole fixtures should be as consistent as possible along a single block.
INSTALL STREET TREES

Issue
Trees improve air quality, reduce storm water runoff, provide shade, increase property values and create urban wildlife habitat. They also increase the quality of life in the White Rock Town Centre. The importance of healthy trees will increase as the density of the Town Centre increases.

Values Supported
Unique Character
Livability
Sustainability

Guidelines
- Trees should be provided along all pedestrian corridors. This includes accommodating tree wells in existing or new sidewalks. Sufficient room should be provided for tree canopies to grow without conflict with other building elements. Irrigation systems and drainage to storm sewers should also be provided, as well as tree guards to protect trunks from damage. Select tree species that are adapted to urban environmental conditions.
Issue
Public use is a priority in plazas, and those created within the White Rock Town Centre should be designed with workers, shoppers, residents and tourists in mind. Therefore, it is important to analyze the location of a proposed plaza in terms of existing plazas in the area, linkages to commercial or transit uses, the population to be served, and the diversity of users. Care should be taken to coordinate plazas with their catchment area.

Values Supported
Density
Character
Accessibility
Diversity
Sustainability

Guidelines
- Link the plaza to corridors in the Town Centre that provide and encourage safe pedestrian walkways by designing for visibility from the street.
- Consider and plan for potential uses of the plaza: relaxation, lunchtime, passing through etc. Provide areas that accommodate public interaction as well as provide a relaxed and secure experience.
- If possible, site plazas to receive noon sun.
- Provide seating for small groups, trees for shade, water features where appropriate and consider views.
- Where appropriate, extend planting into the public right of way to draw attention to the plaza.
- See Appendix C - Plaza Types and Appendix D - Open Space and Pedestrian Network Concept.
This information is to be used in detailed site planning to maximize sunlight in public open spaces.

Solar radiation received by the Town Centre varies depending on the time of day and year. The amount of solar radiation that reaches the street is influenced by building heights on east-west streets and to a lesser extent on north-south streets. The following diagrams have incorporated current street widths, maximum building heights and angles of containment to show seasonal sun angles for Johnston Road and Russell Avenue and two sites on Thrift Avenue – the Hillcrest site and the Surrey Metro site. Generally, sunlight will reach the northern sidewalks by noon between September and March if the ratio of building height to street width does not exceed 0.8. The sun angles shown are for solar noon, when the sun is at the highest position in the sky on a given day. Please note that this sun angle analysis accounts only for direct sunlight and not virtual sunlight, such as that reflected off of building windows and other surfaces.

East-West Streets

North Bluff/16th Avenue
Street width: 24.1 m
Angle of containment on south side: 45 degrees
Maximum height of buildings on south side: 9 to 12 storeys (27.4m to 36.6m)
Months when northern sidewalk would receive direct noon sunlight: April to August.
Russell Avenue
Street width: 19.8 m
Angle of containment on south side: 45 degrees
Angle of containment on north side: 60 degrees
Maximum height of buildings on south side: 9 to 12 storeys (27.4m to 36.6m)
Months when northern sidewalks would receive direct noon sunlight: April to August.

Thrift Avenue / Surrey Metro site
Street width: 18.6 m
No angle of containment on south side
Angle of containment on north side: 60 degrees
Maximum height of buildings on south side: 3 storeys (10.7 m)
Northern sidewalk would receive direct noon sunlight March to September.
Thrift Avenue / Hillcrest site
Street width: 18.6 m
No angle of containment on south side
Angle of containment on north side: 60 degrees
Maximum height of buildings on south side: 3 storeys (10.7 m)
Northern sidewalk would receive direct noon sunlight March to September.

North-South Streets

The sun located in the southern sky shines along the axis of north-south streets for a period during midday every day. For east-west streets, application of a sun access time window would have a dramatically different effect on allowable building heights and angles of containment than on north-south streets. On north-south streets such as Johnston Road, Martin Street, Foster Street and George Street, time windows for sun access can be centered more or less at noontime. Depending on the ratio of building height to street width, the number of hours per day that sunlight reaches west or east sidewalks will vary from 1.5 to 5.
APPENDIX C - PLAZA TYPES

The following information was obtained from the work of Marcus and Francis’ People Places: Design Guidelines for Urban Open Space, 1998. This book proposes that plaza design should be considered in terms of size, location and orientation in order to maximize benefits to users.

**Street Plaza** - widened sidewalk, bus-waiting spaces, arcaded plaza.
**Gateway Plaza** - impressive forecourt, primary entrance to large building.
**Urban Oasis** - sheltered plaza with high concentration of planting and shade.
**Public Plaza** - large plaza for public use.
**Pedestrian Mall** - widened sidewalks both sides of street, transit/rail corridor, common attraction.
**Thru-block Pedestrian Corridors** - means of travelling across the block at ground level.
**Public Square** - major focal point for community activities and gatherings.
APPENDIX D – OPEN SPACE AND PEDESTRIAN NETWORK CONCEPT