



Neighborhood Design Guidelines

Chicago Plan Commission
Proposed Adoption
March 17, 2022



City of Chicago
Lori E. Lightfoot, Mayor

Design Excellence **Neighborhood Design Guidelines**

Department of Planning and Development
Maurice D. Cox, Commissioner
City Hall Room 1000
121 N. La Salle St.
Chicago, IL 60602

**Chicago Plan Commission
Adoption March 17, 2022**

Overview

PURPOSE: Flexible urban design guidelines for Chicago's neighborhood commercial corridors

AUDIENCE: Developers and designers

APPLICATION:
Guide for **all development along neighborhood commercial corridors**

Required **evaluation criteria for projects requiring DPD's design review** (e.g., Planned Developments, Lakefront Protection projects, recipients of City assistance for development)



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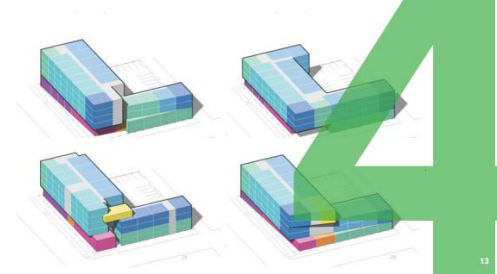
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★ Design Excellence

How do we engender a culture that values design excellence in everyday life?

Design Excellence Thematic Principles:

- 1. Equity & Inclusion**
Achieving fair treatment, targeted support, and prosperity for all residents
- 2. Innovation**
Implementing creative approaches to design and problem solving
- 3. Sense of Place**
Celebrating and strengthening the culture of our communities
- 4. Sustainability**
Committing to environmental, cultural, and financial longevity
- 5. Communication**
Fostering design appreciation and responding to community needs



★ Neighborhood Design Guidelines Process

2019



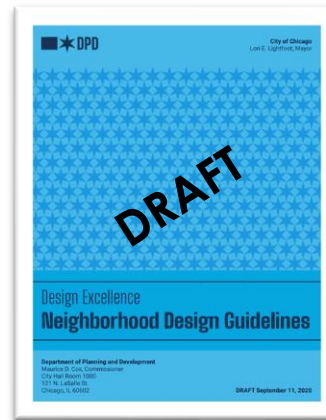
Local thought leaders in design and development, meet monthly

2020



Overarching principles to guide future Design Excellence initiatives

2021

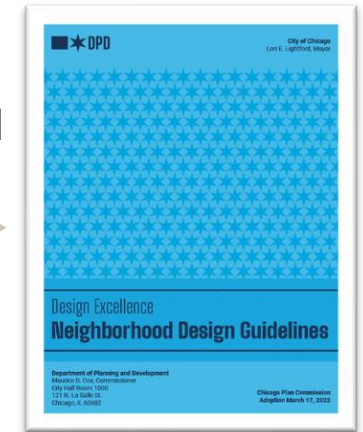


Draft Neighborhood Design Guidelines publicly released

Testing applications and gathering feedback

- Designers
- Developers
- Community Partners
- Public Review

2022

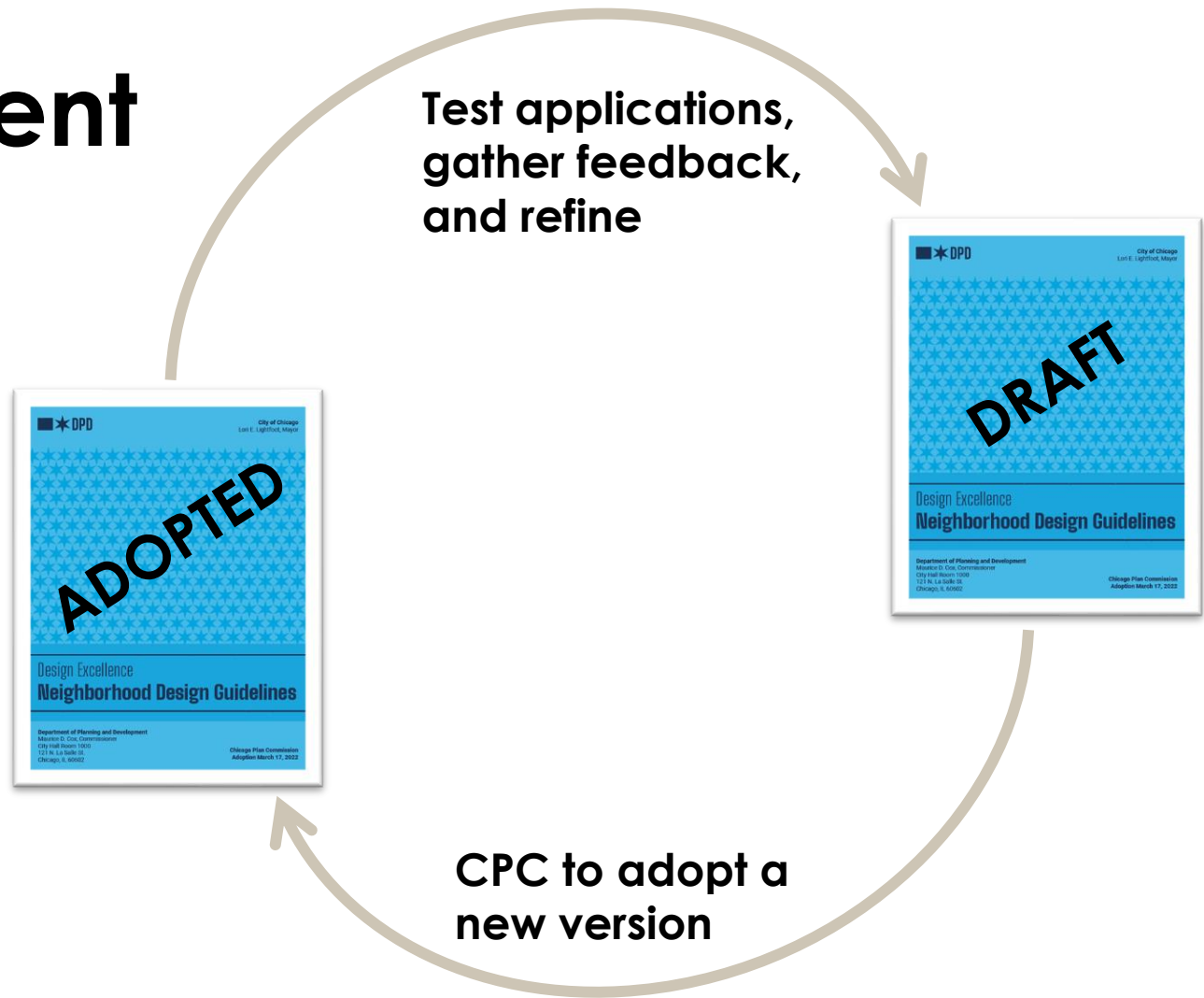


Proposed for CPC adoption

★ A Living Document

DPD will **continue to solicit feedback** and **further refine** the Neighborhood Design Guidelines to:

1. Ensure key urban design elements are appropriately covered and clearly explained
2. Allow enough flexibility for the diverse conditions along Chicago's neighborhood commercial corridors
3. Make the document as user-friendly as possible for the developers and designers using it
4. Continue to complement other relevant requirements, standards, and policies



★ Categories and Topics

1. Sustainability

- Site Selection
- Adaptability
- Design Expression
- Sustainable Design

2. Program

- Use Mix
- Context

3. Site Design

- Orientation and Access
- Open Space
- Parking and Service

4. Public Realm

- Public Right-of-Way
- Landscape
- Accessibility and Safety

5. Massing

- Height
- Access to Light and Air
- Street Wall

6. Façade

- Windows and Doors
- Materials
- Ground Floor
- Signage and Security

Site Design

Orientation and Access

Sites should provide clear access points for various users, prioritizing pedestrian access and locating vehicular access in the rear of the site whenever possible.

- Where possible, orient buildings so that the longest side with glazing faces south to take advantage of energy and lighting efficiency.
- Consider adjacent land uses and views when orienting buildings. Positive views to adjacent features should be preserved while visually buffering detracting adjacent uses.
- Primary pedestrian site access should be prioritized from the main street frontage. On corner sites, access should respond to both streets wherever possible. Public-facing uses should be accessed from major streets, while private uses (e.g. residential entries) should be accessed from side streets.
- Pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular conflicts should be minimized or eliminated, with vehicular site access provided via alleys whenever possible. In addition, parking and loading access should be combined to minimize driveways and allow adequate room for other site programming such as open space.
- On large sites, encourage physical and visible porosity by breaking up development and encouraging through-site pedestrian routes.



Open Space

Open space is critical to the enjoyment of Chicago's neighborhoods and comes in many forms - from private yards to public parks. Whether open space is public or private, it should serve its users well by providing pleasant and usable space for recreation, gathering, and outdoor enjoyment.

- Even when not required, open spaces that are accessible and inviting to the public should be created whenever possible.
- Open space should be located to leverage interior building uses and blend interior and exterior spaces where active ground-level program such as retail, community space, or food service can expand the indoor uses outdoors in pleasant weather.
- Open spaces should include elements such as inviting places to sit, plantings, protection from inclement elements, access to sunlight, quality lighting, and art.
- Provide visual buffers between on-site open spaces and adjacent incompatible land uses and/or views.



Public Realm

Public Right-of-Way

Improvements to the public right-of-way may be necessary to accommodate changes in mobility needs, improve safety, and contribute to the identity of a development.

- Any modifications to the public right-of-way must be approved by the Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) and should follow their guidelines and regulations. Several City resources are available to help identify strategies to improve streetscape sustainability and promote active transportation modes through the creation of complete streets.
- Where existing sidewalks are too narrow to adequately support site uses (e.g. restaurant outdoor seating), identify ways to set the building back from the property line and expand pedestrian pavement within the site boundary, especially for projects that span a large portion of a block. Be mindful of impacts to the block's street wall in the process.
- When designing existing or additional public realm space, consider options for activation and programming to promote vibrancy in the neighborhood.



Landscape

Comprehensive and well maintained landscape areas contribute to the sense of place and experience of the neighborhood. Vegetation, including trees, planting beds, and raised planters soften the hard edges of buildings and walkways while providing a cooling effect through shade and reduced solar gain. High-quality and coordinated landscape elements such as seating, lighting, and other site furnishings contribute to the sense of place and improve human comfort.

- Plant a diverse selection of street trees within the parkway according to the Landscape Ordinance. Provide generous soil volumes for planting areas to allow for expanded root growth and improved tree health.
- Where space allows, soften building edges with front yard plantings. Consider native plant palettes that go beyond lawns and hedges to include flowering shrubs, perennials, and groundcovers to provide multi-seasonal interest and habitat for migrating birds and pollinators.
- Install pedestrian amenities such as seating, lighting, wind blocks, overhead canopies, and recesses where there is high pedestrian traffic or active gathering areas. These elements should be located either within site boundaries or within the parkway and should not impede pedestrian travel.



★ Category #1: Sustainability

Design that has positive long-term environmental, sociocultural, and human health impacts

Guideline Topics:

- **Site Selection**
Prioritizing opportunities for adaptive re-use and transit-oriented infill
- **Adaptability**
Designing for longevity and future adaptation
- **Design Expression**
Celebrating and educating about sustainable features and strategies
- **Best Practices**
Connecting the Neighborhood Design Guidelines with the Chicago Sustainable Development Policy



Former Triangle Motors automobile showroom



Sustainable landscape with adaptive, drought-tolerant plants, which reduce irrigation and manage stormwater

★ Category #2: Program

Targeted uses that complement a development's surrounding context

Guideline Topics:

- **Use Mix**
Composing complementary program types to support a vibrant neighborhood
- **Context**
Aligning program decisions with community desires and needs



A mix of commercial, hotel, and office uses brought needed neighborhood amenities as well as customers.



Adding a bar and event space created social activities and nightlife in a commercial corridor lacking those amenities.

★ Category #3: Site Design

Building orientation, layout, open space, parking, and service

Guideline Topics:

- **Orientation and Access**
Planning a site to optimize accessibility, views, light, and circulation
- **Open Space**
Providing appropriate amounts and types of open space as a part of a development project
- **Parking and Service**
Designing functional parking and service areas while minimizing negative impacts



A single-loaded corridor along the adjacent railroad shields residents from noise and provides views of the courtyard.



Multi-layered landscape buffer provides visual screening from parking and promotes a more pleasant streetscape

★ Category #4: Public Realm

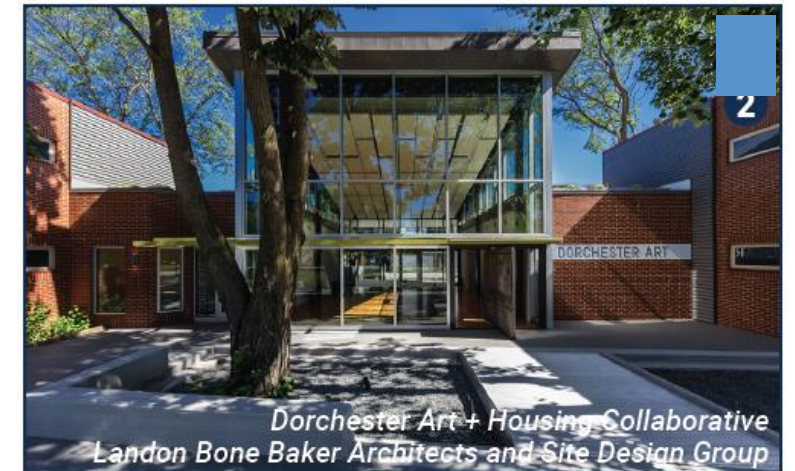
Improvements within and near the public right-of-way adjacent to the development site

Guideline Topics:

- **Public Right-of-Way**
Interfacing with the public realm to enhance its functions and experience
- **Landscape**
Designing integrated landscapes as critical elements of an overall development project
- **Accessibility and Safety**
Prioritizing welcoming, accessible, safe, and comfortable access for all ages, abilities, and identities



Expanded public realm space for outdoor seating under building canopy, sheltered from the elements



Ramps to the accessible entrance integrated into the landscape and lead to the main entry to the building

★ Category #5: Massing

Bulk, height, and form of a development

Guideline Topics:

- **Height**
Contextualizing a proposed development by relating height and height variation to the surroundings
- **Access to Light and Air**
Promoting wellness, quality of life, dignity, and sustainability by considering shadows, natural light, air flow, and connections to the outdoors
- **Street Wall**
Designing to enhance the rhythm of building faces along an urban corridor and the experience of the public realm



The tallest portion of the building transitions on each side to respond to the neighboring two story buildings.



Low first floor retail vacancy creates vibrant, walkable commercial corridors

★ Category #6: Façade

Architectural expression of a building's exterior, including entrances and windows

Guideline Topics:

- **Windows and Doors**
Designing building openings to serve as the interface between indoors and outdoors as well as creating architectural rhythm and design expression
- **Materials**
Selecting high-quality and context-sensitive material palettes
- **Ground Floor**
Promoting active, interesting, and appropriately-scaled ground floors to support the public realm
- **Signage and Security**
Proactively integrating signage and security functions into the overall design to avoid unnecessary clutter and obstruction



South Shore Brew
Triad Consortium

Welcoming atmosphere in a corner cafe across from a train stop



Eyeconic Storefront
Perkins+Will, Tom Harris Photography

Mounted signage is easy to read, clean, and unobstructive to inviting retail space at grade



Plan for Implementation

1. Share guidelines as a **resource for designers and developers** working on Chicago's neighborhood commercial corridors
2. Use guidelines to **evaluate projects** that meet the following criteria:
 - a. Trigger the design review process with the Department of Planning and Development (e.g., Planned Development, Lakefront Protection, and projects receiving City assistance for development)
 - b. Development proposal located along a neighborhood commercial corridor
3. Continue to **gather feedback and refine document** to improve efficacy and utility of guidelines
4. Return to **Chicago Plan Commission to adopt new versions** (substantial updates only)

