City of Houston

Users' Guide for Walkable Places and Transit-Oriented Development

February 2020

PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

A message from Mayor Sylvestor Turner

I am pleased to present you with this Users' Guide for helping improve the pedestrian experience and make our community a safer and more interesting place to walk or ride a bike.

Houston is a city of tremendous opportunity. Already the fourth most populous city in the United States, Houston continues to attract new residents. With them come development projects that provide places for all residents to work and have fun. These projects present opportunities to create more vibrant, walkable streets that support safe transportation options for all Houstonians.

This document is the result of three years of hard work by a committed group of Houstonians who served on the Walkable Places Committee. The Committee studied options, listened to the public and debated alternatives to develop tools that encourage high density, mixed use development along pedestrian-friendly corridors. The Houston City Council adopted the Committee's recommendations in February 2020 and this document illustrates those adopted standards.

Together we can make Houston a more vibrant and walkable city.

Sincerely,

Sylvestor Turner, Mayor
City of Houston

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Creating development that provides safe passage for pedestrians and cyclists is at the heart of the Walkable Places Committee's work.

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01.0 | Introduction

This chapter introduces the project background and overview of Walkable Places and Transit-Oriented Development standards. It explains the important objectives of each program, how they are achieved and the benefits to property owners.

Houston is an auto-centric city. We drive to work. We drive to eat. We drive to shop. We even drive to the convenience store two blocks away. We drive for many different reasons.

Often, it's the quickest way to get anywhere and the convenient free parking is further encouragement to drive. Sometimes, we drive because our streets don't feel safe and comfortable. For the summer months, it's usually too hot for long daytime walks, especially in white-collar job clothing.

For the past several decades, our development rules have encouraged this auto-centric life. Building setbacks and off-street parking requirements in Houston's Code of Ordinances promote development that feels dominated by parking lots. These vast parking lots not only induce driving, but they take away buildable area and limit property values. It's a cycle: more parking lots separate the distance between destinations which require more automobile use, which requires more parking lots.

Traffic congestion, which according to the Rice University Kinder Institute for Urban Research's Houston Area Survey, has become a top issue on the minds of Houstonians, is another by-product. As traffic congeston increases, alternate ways of getting around Houston must be made safe and efficient, and attractive.

Meanwhile, the Houston area contines to experience population growth. Some studies expect another two million people to move to the greater Houston area in the coming three decades. If Houston is going to accommodate as many of those new arrivals as possible, the city must grow up, not out. Houston must increase the density of people living in the urban core. This will be hard to accomplish if we continue to plan and build our city to accommodate more cars. It is time to rethink the way we approach city planning.

Westheimer Road accomodates cars and transit, but is not configured to accomodate other users, such as bicyclists or pedestrians.

A block in the Midtown area of Houston that provides walkability and access to the B-Cycle. This serves the mobility needs for many different users.

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Seattle, WA is one of the first cities in America to recognize the importance of place making with the popularity of the Pike's Place Public market.

Cities across the country have recognized the importance of creating interesting and safe places for people to gather and enjoy amenities.

Often called placemaking, these efforts pay big dividends. They encourage dense, human-scaled development. They often maximize the use of transit and other transportation modes. They integrate land use planning, sustainable transportation options, and pedestrian-oriented urban design. By doing so, cities are made more livable and inviting.

Sustainable urban development that relies less on cars and more on alternate transit is more important than ever. Houstonians understand this and support increased transit. In November 2019, voters overwhelmingly supported METRO's proposal $3.5 billion bond proposal that includes repairs and improvements to the current network, expansion of the light rail transit system and the creaton of a bus rapid transit system.

But, solely increasing investment in public transit is not the solution either. Multi-modal, mixed-use development is necessary to provide safe alternatives to driving, enhance the accessibility of public transit and encourage walking. Mixed-use, public transit-friendly neighborhoods can accommodate housing, restaurants, services, schools, cultural facilities, parks, and more within proximity. This connectivity increases foot traffic and reduces the need for private vehicles, thus creating sustainable, livable urban communities.

The Walkable Places Committee grew out of Plan Houston, Houston's general plan adopted by City Council in 2015.

Plan Houston brought the Houston community together to develop a vision, goals and strategies for the City's future. Plan Houston begins with a vision and goals for the entire community. These statements – generated by Houstonians themselves – describe Houston's preferred future and strategies to achieve it.

Walkable, vibrant communities with dense mixed-use development are a big part of Plan Houston's strategies. Working from this foundation, the Walkable Places Committee proposed proposed two regulatory tools to create vibrant destinations and attract higher density developments that support multi-modal transportation in Houston. They are the Walkable Places Program and Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Standards.

Walkable Places and TOD are only two components of creating a walkable place. With the platform created by Plan Houston, the city and its partners are working on other components, such as the Complete Streets Initiative, the Transportation Plan and the Bike Plan. Each of these efforts has its own focus and addresses different perspectives of urban development in the city. Together, they carry out the Core Strategies of Plan Houston and work towards achieving the community's vision and goals as identified in Plan Houston.

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Plan Houston list several strategies and actions that encourage increased density and walkability.

Grow Responsibily

- Adopt policies supporting existing and future activity centers that enable a combination of live, work and play options.
- Support community investment in public transit and adopt policies that coordinate transit with supporting land development.
- Encourage development of a transportation network that considers all modes of transportation and context sensitive design principles.
- Maintain transportation and infrastructure plans.
- Encourage targeted development and redevelopment that support the City's vitality

Connect People and Places

- Develop and maintain a comprehensive mobility plan.
- Encourage compact, pedestrian-friendly development around transit.
- Support a well-connected transportation network that includes transit, bicycle and pedestrian options.
- Work with partner agencies to increase transit ridership among all Houstonians.

For more information, go to www.planhouston.org

Source: Stephanie Ann Sellers/Shutterstock.com

Walkable Places encourage active streets that encourage strolling and shopping.

The Walkable Places Committe established two parallel programs that encourage the development of more dense, walkable places.

Walkable Places

The Walkable Places Program establishes a process to create context sensitive, pedestrian-friendly development along designated street segments within the city.

These areas become destinations. Places where people congregate, walking from one use to another. They may include restaurants, shops, art venues, even residential uses. The point is that they are places that Houstonians can move through, leaving their automobiles elsewhere.

Walkable Places support communities, property owners, and developers by providing options that create interesting and enjoyable, walkable destinations. The program gives property owners more flexibility in their development to create these places. This encourages more pedestrian and business activities in closer proximity and will lead to greater economic vitality in the city. Every Houston street is eligible to be designated through the Walkable Places program.

The Walkable Places Committee wanted to test these options an ddesignated three Walkable Place Pilot Areas. They are Hogan/Lorraine Street in Near Northside, Midtown, and Emancipation Avenue in Third Ward. Each pilot area has its own characteristics and the Planning and Development Department has been collaborating with the community to create Walkable Place Pilot Area Plans. Details of the Walkable Place Pilot Area Plans may be found on the Department webpage.

Transit-Oriented Development

In addition to Walkable Places, the Committee examined the City's TOD rules that had been established in 2009. These rules, designed to encourage walkable environments surrounding transit stations, had been optional to property owners. However, the optional

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performance standards have not created enough incentives to encourage TODs and were rarely used. The Committee reviewed these standards and conducted extensive research on other U.S. cities' best practices to promote TOD and set forth these revisions.

The updated TOD standards focus on promoting a comfortable walking experience that facilitates transit use and aligns with empirical research and federal guidance on the distances people walk to and from transit. Changes to the 2009 rules include the following:

- Establish objective criteria to determine the streets eligible for the TOD standards.
- Establish the TOD Streets as either mandatory or optional, depending on the context; and
- Update the planning standards for properties along the TOD Streets.

Comparing the Two Programs

Both programs offer developers more buildable area and encourage the use of design elements that activate pedestrian areas.

Both programs have two types of street designation that come with distinct opportunities for pedestrian improvements. Both programs create mandatory and optional compliance standards tailored to the adjacent neighborhood.

The programs differ in significant ways. While the City of Houston or a property owner may propose the designation of a Walkable Place, the City designates TOD Streets by evaluating each qualified transit station with a series of objective criteria. A Walkable Place may be designated anywhere in the city, whereas a TOD Street may be designated only by its proximity to a qualified transit station.

Together, Walkable Places and the Transit-Oriented Development standards create help the City design, build, and maintain a vibrant pedestrian environment for Houston to grow responsibly and sustainably.

Source: Trong Nguyen/Shutterstock.com

METRO's Red Line takes riders from the Northwest Transit Center to downtown in an average of 20 minutes.

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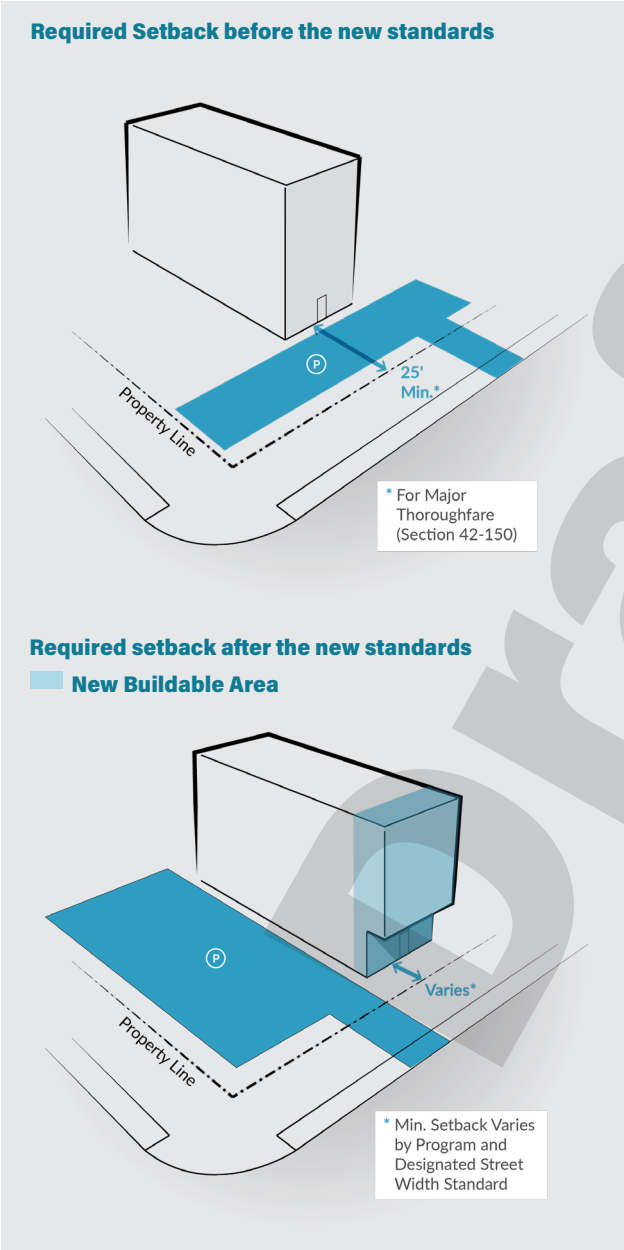
Increased Allowable Building Area



These new regulatory tools benefit the property owner in two primary ways.

First, they allow for more buildable area on the lot. For instance, previous development regulations required all buildings placed along a Major Thoroughfare to be set back from the street at least 25 feet. This setback made a large portion of the lot unavailable for any structure. As a result, the only option left to many property owners was to put a parking lot on that part of the property. This reduced the size of structure that the property owner could build, and limited the benefit of his/her investment.

Both of these programs reduce the required setback and provide the property owner fowith more area on which to build. This enhances the owner's property value and allows a quicker recapture of their investment.

The second major benefit to property owners is the potential reduction in the number of required parking spaces. Parking is expensive. Not only from the cost of constructing it, but also for the cost of the land that must be devoted to it. Both of these programs provide options for the property owner to decide the amount of parking that his development requires.

The reduction of parking requirements means fewer unattended parking lots, fewer dangerous driveway curb cuts, and more blocks of pedestrian-friendly commercial development. By allowing the property owner to decide on their specific parking needs, they are encouraged to put their land to more productive use and can construct a larger building that will attract more residents and visitors to the area.

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02.0 | Design Principles and Elements

This chapter introduces the design principles and program elements. These are the foundation of the Walkable Places and the Transit-Oriented Development standards discussed in Chapters Three and Four.

The Walkable Places Committee established five principles to guide the direction of both programs. These principles set a framework for the programs' design elements and standards.

1 | Be sensitive to local context The standards should provide flexibility and acknowledge the neighborhood's local context. This will ensure the standards are versatile across the city and can build on unique neighborhood assets and character.

2 | Ensure walkable urban form along proposed streets The standards should establish consistent public realm design and reinforce safe, pleasant walking experiences.

3 | Promote safe multi-modal transportation The standards should promote safe and easy accessibility to different modes of transportation and reduce automobile dependency.

4 | Create a pleasant experience The standards should create a pleasant walking experience for pedestrians of all ages and abilities to connect Houstonians to their neighbors, businesses, public spaces, and neighborhood destinations.

5 | Obtain local support The standards should be supported and championed by local neighborhoods interested in bringing pedestrian-friendly improvements to their communities.

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Source: Lynne Neuman/Shutterstock.com

Walkable Places have a diversity of uses and are interesting places to be.

Source: Stephanie Ann Sellers/Shutterstock.com

The historic Market Square area of downtown remains one of the most walkable areas in Houston

This section introduces key elements and describes how these elements create a more pedestrian-friendly environment. The specific requirements for each element will be discussed in Chapters Three and Four.

The letters in the following paragraphs are illustrated below to increase understanding.

A | Pedestrian Realm The pedestrian realm is the area between the back-of-curb (BOC), or the edge of a street's pavement, and the ground floor building façade. It includes an unobstructed sidewalk for walking and a safety buffer area.

B | Safety Buffer The safety buffer area shields the sidewalk from the street, and can contain a combination of landscaping, utlities and sidewalk amenities such as street furniture, decorative plantings and awnings.

C | Ground-Floor Façade Fenestration Doors, windows, and decorative features on ground-floor façade improves the pedestrian experiences in our public spaces. They also add "eyes on the street" for increased safety.

D | Awnings and Covered Walkways Awnings and overhangs define building entrances and provide visual decoration, shade, and respite from rain. As an architectural feature, they create a comforting pedestrian environment.

E | Fences If fences are installed within the pedestrian realm, they should be low and/or decorative. Fences should visually unite the private and public spaces. This helps community interaction and creates a safer place.

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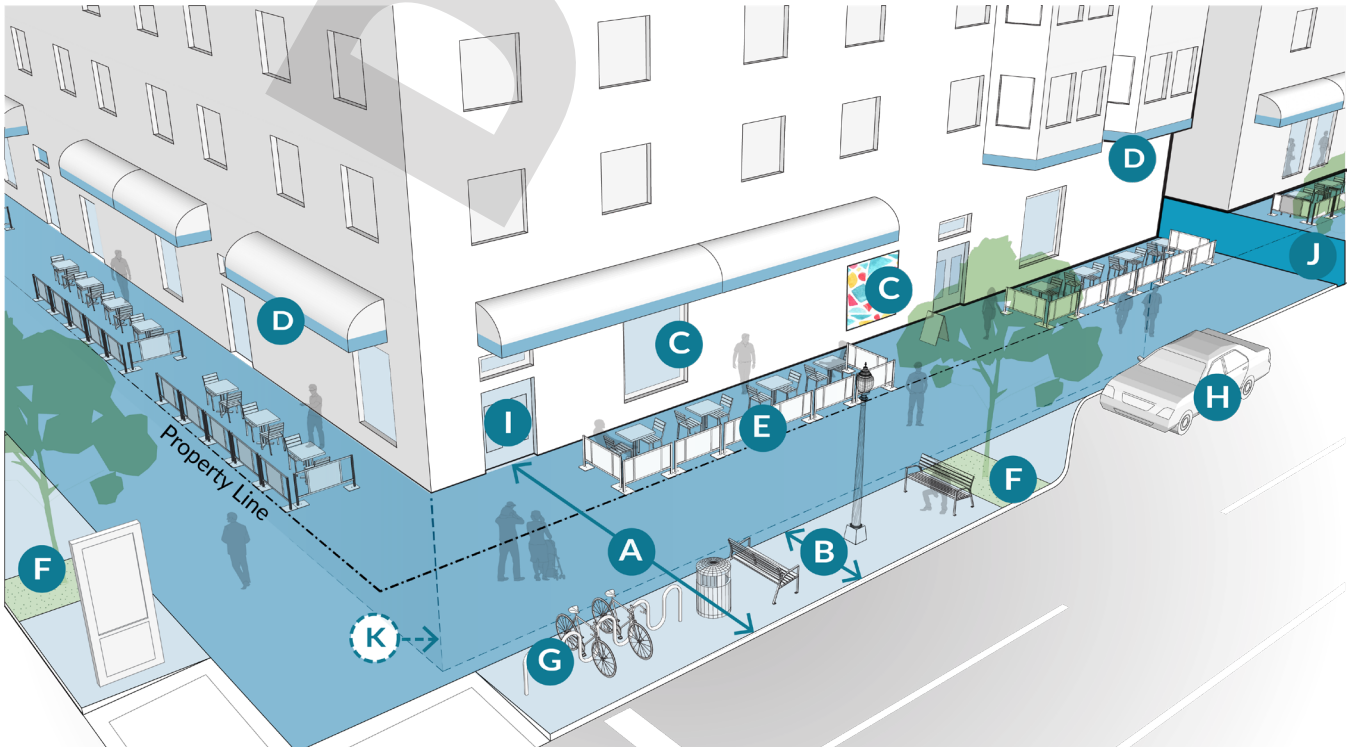

F | Landscaping Landscape is an important element within the pedestrian realm, especially in the safety buffer. It provides important shade, storm water management and protection from automobiles. The program encourages a percentage of the streetscape to be dedicated to landscape and sets maximum areas to ensure that a majority of the pedestrian realm area is reserved for pedestrians, seating, and activities. Installed street trees must be chosen from an approved list provided by the City of Houston.

G | Bicycle Parking Bicycle parking can supplement transit ridership in bustling urban areas. Providing bicycle parking encourages the use of active travel modes and can help reduce congestion on area streets.

H | Auto-Related Uses The program standards provide property owners direction on drop-off loading areas, driveway access, and bicycle parking. They support multimodal users by dedicating space and providing guidance in the land development process.

I | Public Entrances and Front Doors All building entrances should open directly to the sidewalk. They may connect directly or through an accessway or path. These direct connections encourage community interactions and provide visual interest to the street. They also provide safety as they limit hidden doorways and entrances.

J | Driveways The two programs promote a safer and more comfortable pedestrian experience by limiting the width and number of driveways on a single property to preserve continuous sidewalks and on-street parking spaces along the designated streets.

K | Below-Grade Structures Below-grade structures are basements or underground parking areas. The programs allow these to be extended up to the property line.

Multiple elements contribute to making a space enjoyable and safe to walk through.
Source: Smart Cities Dive

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03.0 | Walkable Places

This chapter summarizes the Walkable Place program, inclucing the designation process and the applicable standards.

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City of Houston and property owners can each initiate the designation of a Walkable Place.

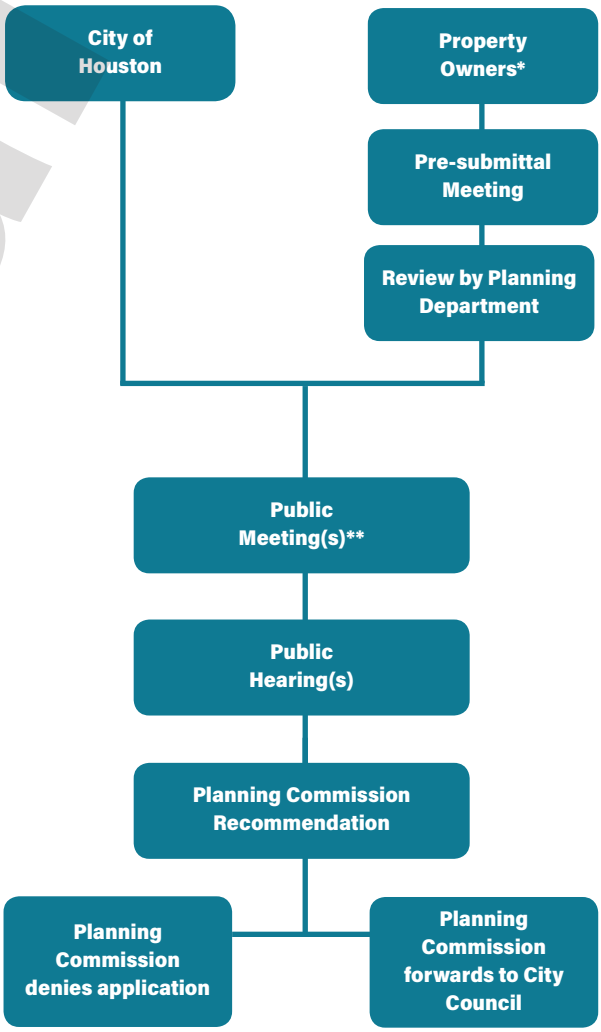
It all starts by creating a Walkable Place Street Layout Plan that will include at least one street segment where new development and redevelopment along the street may be eligible for Walkable Places standards. This Plan will identify whether the segments included are Primary WP Streets or Secondary WP Streets.

The petition for designating a Walkable Place must include at least one Primary WP Street. Secondary WP Streets are optional for the designation. When property owners apply for a Walkable Place designation, the designation requires support from owners of at least 50% of properties fronting each street segment. The designation follows this process:

1. The applicant schedules a required pre-submittal meeting with the Planning & Development Department to ensure the applicant is familiar with the program requirements.
2. The applicant submits a Walkable Place application that includes everything that is identified on the submittal requirement checklist.
3. The Planning & Development Department reviews the submission for completeness. The applicant and the Department jointly plan and conduct a public meeting to present the proposed designation boundaries and the corresponding planning standards to the community.
4. The Planning & Development Department conducts a public hearing at the Planning Commission to engage property owners and community members in the proposal.
5. The Planning Commission determines whether or not to make a recommendation to City Council.
6. City Council considers the application for a Walkable Place designation.

If strict compliance with the applicable TOD Standards creates undue hardship or impractical development, property owners or developers may apply for a variance.

Walkable Places Petition Process



* Requires 50% support of total property owners with frontage along each street block

** Required if initiated by City of Houston or more than one property owner

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A Walkable Place Plan (WPP) will identify the street segments included are Primary or Secondary Walkable Place streets .

Primary Street any segment designated by the WPP on which new development and redevelopment must meet the applicable Walkable Places Standards.

Secondary Street any segment designated by the WPP on which new development and redevelopment may opt-in to the applicable Walkable Places standards.

Following the pre-submittal meeting, property owners wishing to create a WPP must provide the following information on forms provided by the Planning and Development Department.

Forms may be found on the Department webpage **ADD HYPERLINK**, or by calling 832-393-6600. Petitions must demonstrate property owner support and provide a plan as indicated below:

Evidence of support forms signed by property owners representing more than 50% of the linear street frontage along both sides of all proposed WP Streets included in the application. The signature of one owner of a property shall be presumed to represent the consent of all owners of a property with more than one owner.

A proposed Walkable Place Plan showing the following information in the required format. All existing and proposed elements shown on the layout plan must be proportional.

- Vicinity map, north arrow, legend;
- Proposed Primary and Secondary WP Street designations;
- Proposed rights-of-way width for each Walkable Place street segment
- Proposed building setback or pedestrian realm width for each Walkable Place street segment; and
- Proposed unobstructed sidewalk width for each Walkable Places street segment

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A petition for a Walkable Place designation must include five standards for each street segment within the proposed Walkable Place.

The Walkable Places standards only apply to new development and redevelopment on properties along the designated WP Streets. This section introduces the options and details of each standard.

Standard one: Street Width

The City of Houston Code of Ordinances regulates minimum street-width requirements based on street classification. To allow adequate flexibility to address unique community context and conditions along a WP Street, the Walkable Places Program allows establishment of alternative minimum WP Street width, if appropriate justification is provided.

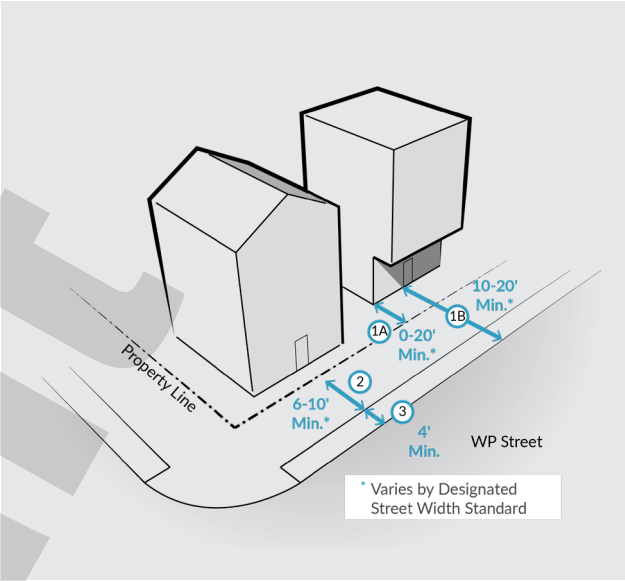
Standard two: Pedestrian Realm

The pedestrian realm is the space between the street's curb and the ground floor façade of the adjacent building. It provides physical space for pedestrian activity, buffering from vehicular and bicycle traffic along the street, and space for shade and other elements affecting pedestrian comfort. Seven design elements are included in the Walkable Places pedestrian realm standards. These standards apply to all new development and redevelopment along Primary WP Streets and opt-in development along Secondary WP Streets.

To improve the placemaking in the designated Walkable Place, the unobstructed sidewalk width and safety buffer width standards apply to all new development and redevelopment along Secondary WP Streets, even if the development does not opt-in to the Walkable Places Standards.

1 | Minimum Pedestrian Realm Width can be measured two ways. One approach is to measure widths from the property line to the ground floor building façade (i.e. building setback). The other way is to measure from the back-of-curb to the ground floor building façade. There are five options for each

Pedestrian Realm Width



Richmond Avenue is a narrow right-of-way where a more narrow pedestrian realm requirement may be established.

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A desireable pedestrian realm provides elements that interest and protect the pedestrian.

approach to allow flexibility to align the streetscape design with the physical characteristics of the street. Generally, a wider pedestrian realm is desirable along wider streets and streets with more pedestrian activities. Although 15' is the typical pedestrian realm width along urban corridors, high activity corridors should have pedestrian realm widths of 20' or more. On the other hand, when there is an on-street cutback parking or loading area along a WP Street, a minimum 10' wide pedestrian realm next to the cutback or loading area is allowed. Since the cutback creates a buffer between pedestrians and vehicular traffic, a minimum 10' wide pedestrian realm should be sufficient to accommodate pedestrian activities.

Walkable Places Pedestrian Realm Standards

	Elements	Standards	
	All uses		
1	Minimum Pedestrian Realm Width	1A Measured from property line to building façade	0', 5', 10', 15', or 20'
		1B Measured from back of curb to building façade	10', 12', 15', 18', or 20'
2	Minimum Unobstructed Sidewalk Width	6', 8', or 10'	
3	Minimum Safety Buffer Width	4'	
4	Maximum Softscape	35%	
5	Minimum Street Tree Size	2" caliper	
6	Fences	The maximum allowable height in the pedestrian realm is 48". A fence located between the back of curb and the building façade shall be a non-opaque fence.	
7	Auto-Related Uses	No auto-related uses, except: • Driveway(s) perpendicular with the Walkable Place Street; or • Pedestrian drop-off/loading area beyond minimum pedestrian realm width on a Secondary Walkable Place Street where the design is approved by the City Traffic Engineer.	

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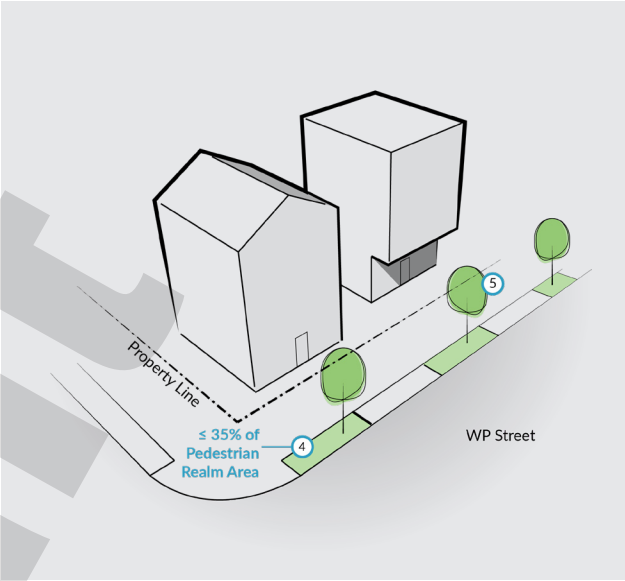
2 | Minimum Unobstructed Sidewalk Within the pedestrian realm, an unobstructed sidewalk is required to provide a safe path for people to walk along that is separated from vehicular traffic. There are three options for unobstructed sidewalk width. Depending on the street width, the existing conditions, and the development characteristics along the street, the minimum unobstructed sidewalk width can be 6', 8', or 10'. Sidewalk widths shall be commensurate with the level of pedestrian activity desired for the specific street.

3 | Minimum Safety Buffer Width The safety buffer area is the space between the back-of-curb and the sidewalk. This area may include street furniture and amenities, such as lighting, benches, newspaper kiosks, utility poles, fire hydrants, landscaping, and bicycle parking. The safety buffer area provides a barrier between pedestrians and faster-moving traffic and makes walking a much more enjoyable experience. The minimum safety buffer width is 4'.

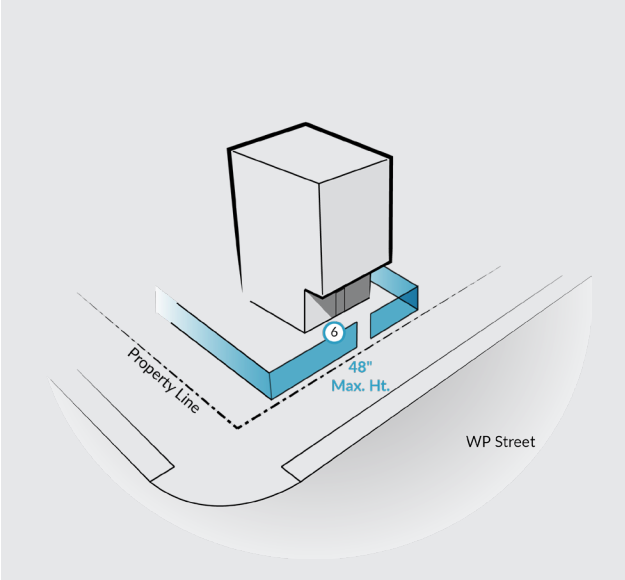
4 | Maximum Softscape Softscape refers to the live horticultural elements of a landscape. It includes flowers, plants, shrubs, trees, flower beds etc. Appropriate softscape within the pedestrian realm creates a pedestrian-friendly environment on the street. However, excessive softscape may obstruct the pedestrian path and isolate pedestrians from the adjacent development. The maximum softscape area within the pedestrian realm is 35% of the pedestrian realm's surface area.

5 | Minimum Street Tree Size Properly placed and spaced street trees help to provide shade and separate pedestrians from vehicular traffic. A minimum 2" caliper street tree size is required to promote safer and more walkable streets in a designated Walkable Place. Street trees planted along a WP Street must abide by the Code of Ordinances standards in Chapter 33 on species and spacing requirements.

Softscape and Trees



Property Fronting Walkable Places Street Street



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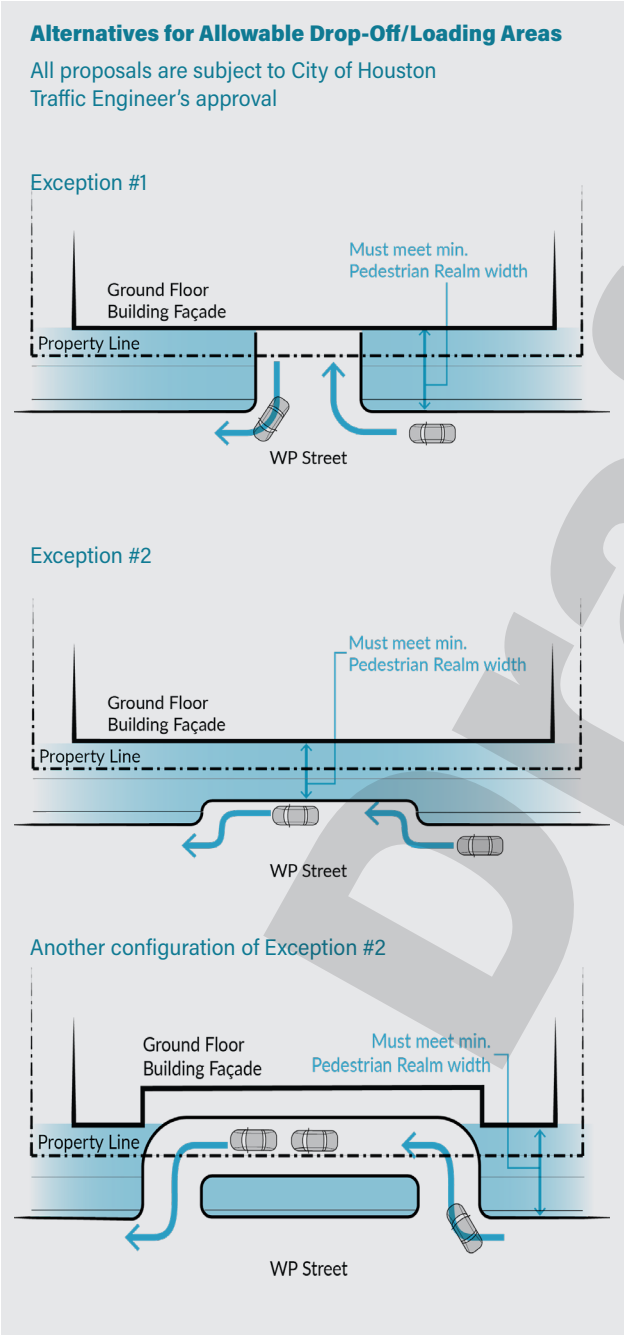
Auto-Related Uses



6 | Fences To allow more interaction between the pedestrians and the adjacent development along a WP Street, fences in the pedestrian realm (on public or private property) must be non-opaque. The maximum fence height is 48".

7 | Auto-Related Uses To improve pedestrian safety, and create a more enjoyable and comfortable walking experience, no auto-related use is allowed within the pedestrian realm of a WP Street.

There are two exceptions: (1) driveway(s) perpendicular with a WP Street; (2) pedestrian drop-off and loading areas beyond the minimum pedestrian realm width. Any proposed driveway locations and dimensions as well as pedestrian drop-off and loading areas beyond the pedestrian realm must be approved by the City Traffic Engineer.

Site Design Standard

Site design has a major impact on the activity, vitality, and safety of the adjacent streets. Active uses (such as retail, lobbies and event spaces) should be placed strategically along pedestrian routes to engage the public. Residential entrances should be designed to provide a graceful transition from public to private. The Walkable Places program takes different land uses into consideration and establishes two sets of site design standards. One is for single family residential uses, the other is for all other uses.

Single Family Residential Uses In the past two decades, a significant number of narrow homes have been built in the Houston urban area. These homes have front-loading garages and driveways that span the entire lot's width. Often, these homes are built in such quantity along a street that the pedestrian realm is disrupted with one driveway after another. This triggers concerns for pedestrian safety.

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A Single-Family Residential project with front doors opening to the street and vehicular access from a single rear driveway.

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Walkable Places Site Design Standards

Elements	Standards
Single Family Residential	
Lot Access	If a tract is subdivided, lot access must be from a shared driveway, Type 2 Permanent Access Easement, alley, or new public street created by the same subdivision plat
All Other Uses	
Below-Grade Structures	Allowed up to the property line
Driveway location and dimensions for each property under common ownership or legal interest	Max one 30' wide two-way driveway or two 15' wide one-way driveways along the Walkable Place Street for every 300'. Exceptions: • For properties fronting more than one street, no new driveways are allowed along the Primary Street. If two or more streets are Primary Streets, then the property owner may select one street to meet the driveway standards. • Properties fronting three or more streets may have one non-Primary Street that is exempt from driveway location and dimension requirements.

To overcome this challenge and preserve a pedestrian-friendly environment along WP Streets, the Walkable Places program requires shared driveways for new single family residential homes on subdivided parcels. Newly constructed single-family residential houses must access the adjacent WP Street through either a shared driveway, a *Type 2 Permanent Access Easement* (defined in the City's Code of Ordinances), an alley, or a new public street created by the new subdivision. The shared lot access requirement does not apply to single-family homes constructed on the original parcels that are not further subdivided.

All Other Uses For uses other than single-family residential, parking is key to site planning. It should be placed where it will not disrupt pedestrian spaces. In walkable urban environments, buildings are placed close to streets and public spaces, rather than set back behind parking lots or expanses of landscaping. Where buildings are set back behind parking lots or landscaping, pedestrians are isolated from uses and activities, exposed to traffic and forced to walk greater distances. For this reason, loading areas, service entrances, and driveways should be limited in size and located where they minimize disruption of pedestrian access.

Specifically, property owners may provide, at most, one 30' two-way driveway or two 15' one-way driveways every 300' on their property on a WP Street.

- If properties front more than one street, no new driveways are allowed along the Primary WP Street.
- If properties front two or more Primary WP Streets, the property owners may decide which street will meet the driveway location and dimension standards.
- If properties front three or more streets, one non-Primary WP Street may be exempted from driveway location and dimension standards.

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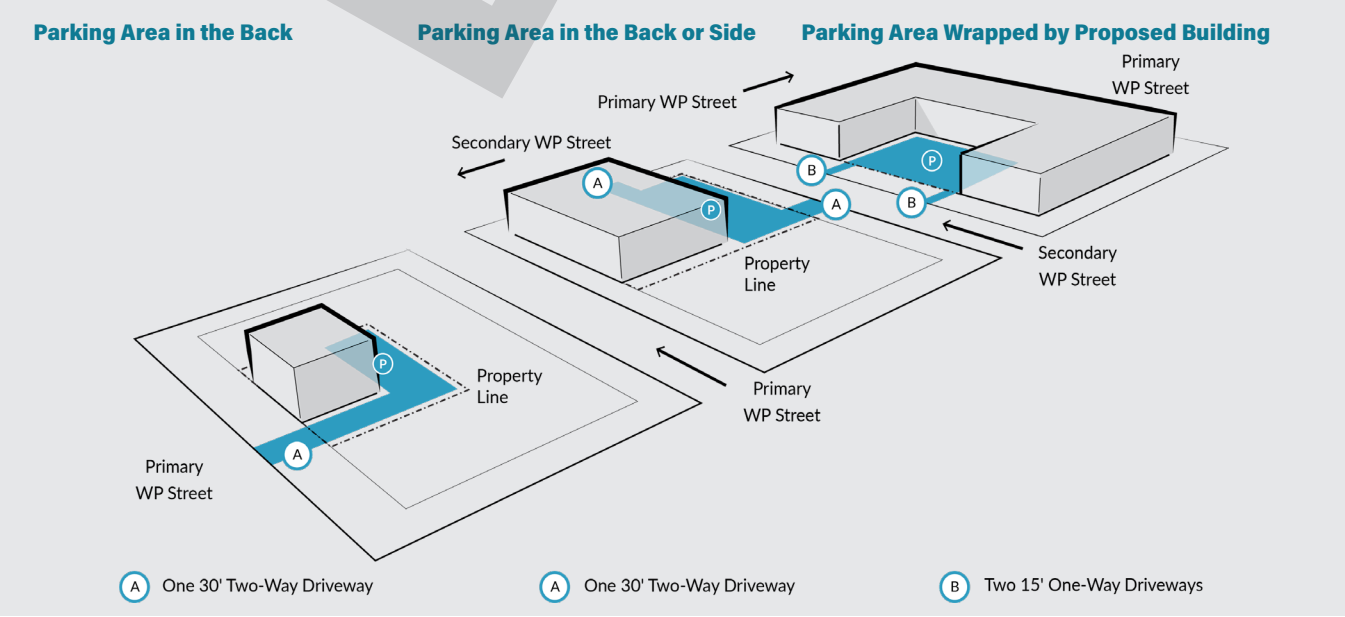
Parking Lot Placement in Walkable Places



Building Design Standard

Building design is a critical component to promoting walkability. Buildings should meet and engage people at a human scale, with awnings, façade elements, and other features along the pedestrian realm.

To promote a pedestrian-friendly environment along a WP Street, the Walkable Place program establishes two types of ground floor building design. One is for single-family residential use, the other is for all other uses.

Single-Family Residential Generally, buildings with doors and windows provide a source of visual interest. They create a comfortable environment by attracting pedestrians to the street and connecting them to the on-going activities in the adjacent buildings. Considering the nature of single-family residential homes, to preserve residential privacy, the Walkable Places program has no minimum transparency requirements for single-family houses fronting a WP Street. However, if a single family residential house is constructed abutting a WP Street, it is required to have a front door opening to the WP Street with pedestrian access.

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Walkable Places Building Design Standards

	Elements	Standards
	Single Family Residential	
1	Front Door Facing the Walkable Place Street with Pedestrian Access	Required for each dwelling unit that abuts the Walkable Place Street
	All Other Uses	
2	Public Entrance to the Pedestrian Realm	Minimum one for each Primary Street and for properties that opt-in to the standards on Secondary Streets (see Chapter 3 for definistions of Streets)
3	Ground Floor Fenestration and Decorative Features	Primary Walkable Place Street: Minimum 30% decorative features, including minimum 15% fenestration
		Secondary Walkable Place Street: Minimum 20% decorative features, including minimum 10% fenestration, except: • Building fronting three (3) or more Walkable Place Streets may have one non-Primary Street exempt from the fenestration or decorative feature requirement.
4	Minimum unobstructed vertical clearance within the pedestrian realm on private property	4A Decorative shade structures/unenclosed balconies: 8'
		4B Other overhang buildable areas: 10'

Numbers reference the illustration on page 24.

All Other Uses The Walkable Places program also sets Building Design standards for all land uses that are not single-family residential, such as commercial, multifamily, mixed-use, industrial, and civic uses. These standards include elements such as public entrances, ground floor decorative features (arrangement of windows, doors, and other features such as murals, artwork, mosaics, photographs, water features, sculptures, plantings or "living walls" on the surface area of the façade between ground level and eight feet high of the building), and vertical unobstructed clearances.

To create interaction with the abutting pedestrian realm and the street, property owners should make at least one primary entrance of the building visible and accessible from the abutting WP Street.

Ground floor decorative features help to enhance the pedestrian's visual environment and acts as "eyes on the street." Along Primary WP Streets, property owners should provide at least 30% ground floor decorative features, with minimum 15% of the area arranged with windows and building openings. Along Secondary Streets, property owners should provide at least 20%, with minimum 10% of the area arranged with windows and building openings.

Overhead architectural features, such as awnings, canopies, trellises or cornice treatments provide shade, reduce heat, and enhance a pedestrian-friendly environment. These architectural features can be constructed up to the property line if they meet the following two conditions: (1) preserve a minimum 8-foot unobstructed vertical clearance for shade structures or unenclosed balconies; (2) preserve a minimum 10-foot unobstructed vertical clearance for overhanging buildable areas.

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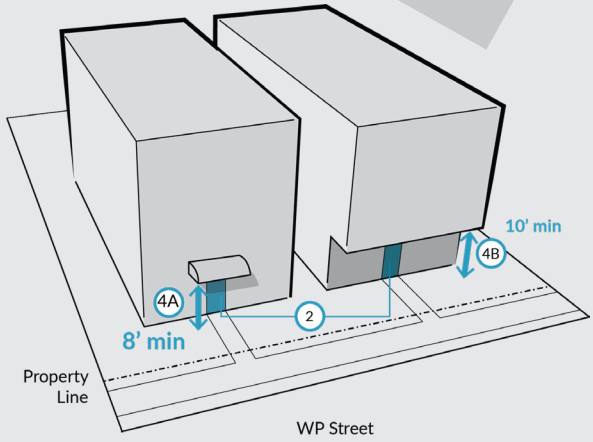
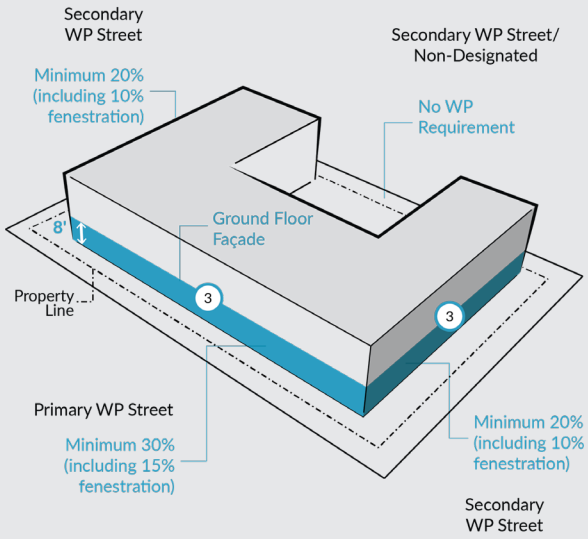
Ground Floor Design Elements

Walkable Places Entrances and Overhead Features



Walkable Places Decorative Features



Off-Street Parking Standard

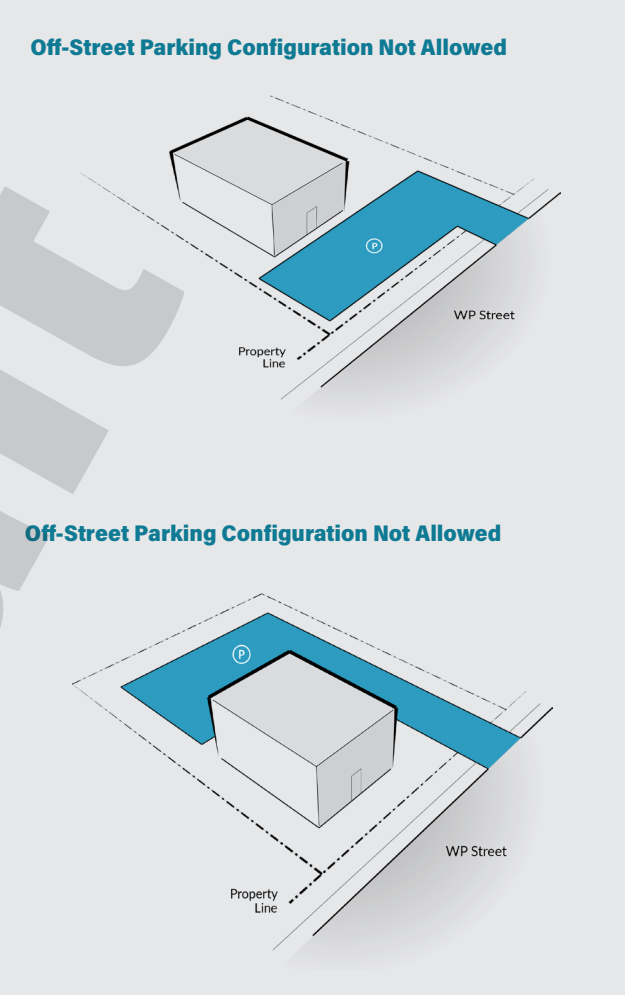
The Walkable Places Program allows property owners to decide the off-street parking requirements for new development and redevelopment in the proposed Walkable Place based on their individual context.

Off-street Parking Standards If property owners decide that there is special parking demand for the proposed Walkable Place, they can petition for a Special Parking Area (SPA) which allows communities to establish special parking arrangements. The SPA petition can be filed simultaneously with the Walkable Place designation. Details of SPA petitions may be found on the Department webpage**. NEED HYPERLINK**

If property owners decide that there is no special parking demand for the proposed Walkable Place, the parking requirements in Chapter 26 of the Code of Ordinances will apply.

Additional Bicycle Parking Standards Walkable Places are generally commercial hubs or community destinations. The demand for different modes of transportation to access these areas is much higher. Therefore, the Walkable Places Program establishes additional bicycle parking requirements for new development and redevelopment in the proposed Walkable Places.

Off-Street Parking



Walkable Places Off-Street Parking Standards

Designation	Off-Street Minimum Parking Standards
All uses	
Primary and Secondary Streets	Is determined by the Walkable Places Plan
Bicycle Parking	1 bicycle space for every 5,000 square feet of ground floor area
	1 bicycle space for every 20 dwelling units for Multi-Family Residential

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04.0 | Transit-Oriented Development Standards

This chapter summarizes the Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) standards. It introduces how the standards are determined and where these standards apply.

Transit-Oriented Design (TOD) is an urban development pattern that maximizes the amount of residential, business and leisure space within walking distance of public transit.

TOD aims to increase public transit ridership by reducing the use of cars and by promoting sustainable urban growth. TODs are normally located within one-quarter to one-half mile around the central transit stop, as this is considered to be an appropriate walking distance for pedestrians.

Since METRO's creation, Houstonians have invested billions of dollars in our transit system and recently voted to invest $3.5 billion more. Houston must maximize this investment by creating development that provides better connections to the transit options and encourages increased ridership. These TOD standards do that.

These standards create a new type of street segment, **a TOD street**, which is a qualified street segment within one half-mile walking distance from the transit station platform. There are two types of TOD Streets. A **Primary TOD street** is within a 1,000-foot walking distance of a transit station where new development must adhere to the TOD standards. A **Secondary TOD Street** is between 1,000 feet and one-half mile walking distance from the transit station platform where properties along the street may opt-in to the TOD rules.

If strict compliance with the applicable TOD Standards creates undue hardship or impractical development, property owners or developers may apply for a variance.

Source: Mark Taylor Cunningham/Shutterstock.com

Need caption here

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Transit-Oriented Streets are identified by the Planning Department's three-step process.

Primary Street A Primary TOD Street lies within a one-quarter mile walking distance of a transit station platform. Standards are mandatory on Primary streets.

Secondary Street A Secondary TOD Street lies between a ¼ mile and ½ mile walking distance from a transit station platform. Standards are optional on Secondary streets.

The Committee established an objective set of criteria for use in designating which streets should be TOD Streets, and whether they should be Primary or Secondary.

Transit stations in Houston have a wide variety of development characteristics surrounding them. For example, the development pattern surrounding the Fannin South Station is significantly different from the pattern adjacent to the Museum Park Station, even though both stations are on the Red Line and not far away from each other. When considering how to establish TOD Streets, the Walkable Places Committee asked for standards that were appropriate to a specific station. The Committee did not want a "one size fits all" approach.

The Committee developed objective criteria to guide the TOD Street designation. These criteria not only consider existing land uses but also evaluate the potential for future development. For example, to preserve the established residential neighborhood characteristics, a street segment mainly developed with single family residential is not eligible for TOD Street designation. Freeways and freeway frontage roads are designed for faster vehicular traffic. Generally, these streets are not desirable to promote pedestrian activities. Therefore, they are not eligible for TOD Street designation either.

If a transit station is in an area with high multi-modal transportation demand, the transit station is eligible for both Primary TOD Street and Secondary TOD Street designation. Otherwise, the transit station is only eligible for Secondary TOD Street designation.

The Planning and Development Department evaluated each designated light rail transit and BRT station based on these criteria and created the TOD Street Boundary Map. Both the TOD Street designation criteria and boundary map may be found on the department webpage Click Here

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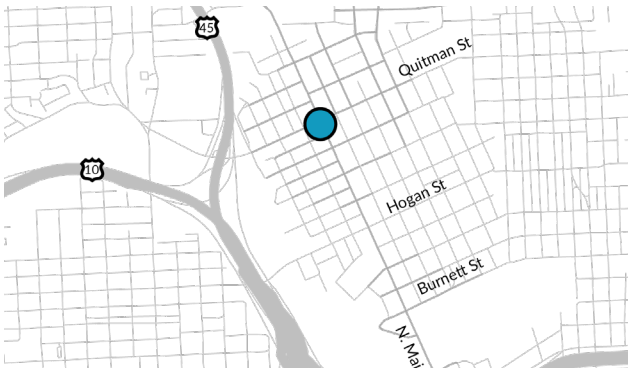
Quitman Station

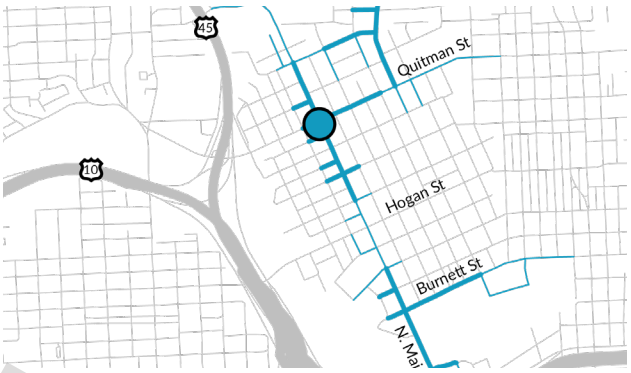
Previous Standards



Transit Station
TOD Streets

0 0.1 0.2 0.5 mi

New Standards

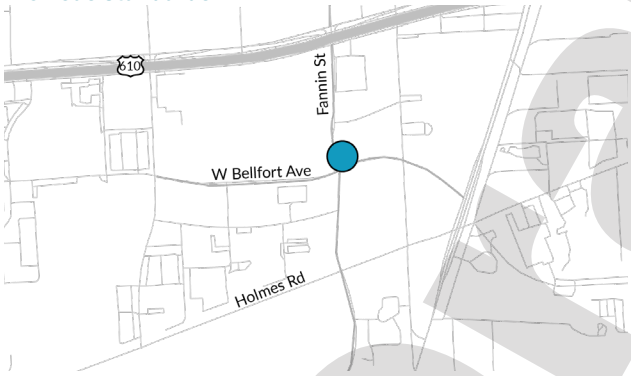


Transit Station
Primary Streets
Secondary Streets

0 0.1 0.2 0.5 mi

Fannin Station

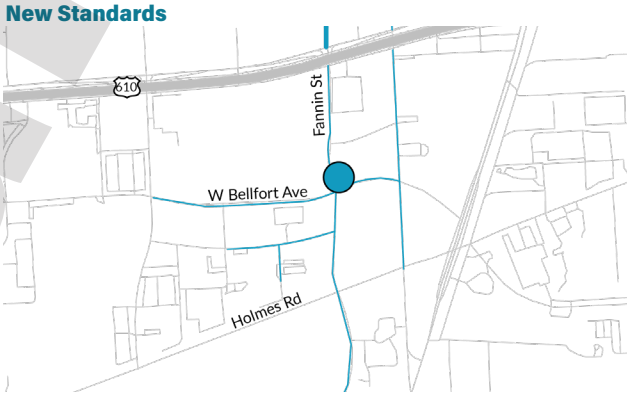
Previous Standards



Transit Station
TOD Streets

0 0.1 0.2 0.5 mi

New Standards

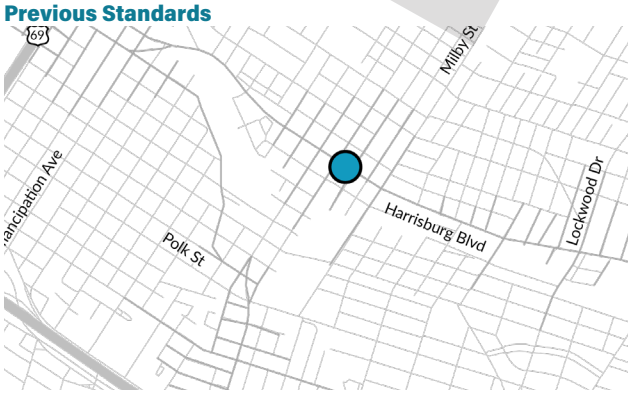


Transit Station
Primary Streets
Secondary Streets

0 0.1 0.2 0.5 mi

Coffee Plant Station

Previous Standards



Transit Station
TOD Streets

0 0.1 0.2 0.5 mi

New Standards

Transit Station
Primary Streets
Secondary Streets

0 0.1 0.2 0.5 mi

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The TOD standards work at the street level and the site level to create a comfortable pedestrian environment.

The TOD standards include pedestrian realm standards, site design standards, building design standards, and off-street parking standards. Like Walkable Places standards, the TOD standards only apply to new development and redevelopment on properties along the designated TOD Streets. This section introduces the options and details of each standard.

Pedestrian Realm

The pedestrian realm is the space between the street's curb and the ground floor façade of the adjacent building. It provides physical space for pedestrian activity, buffering from the vehicular and bicycle traffic along the street, and space for shade and other elements affecting pedestrian comfort.

Seven design elements are included in the TOD pedestrian realm standards. These standards apply to all new development and redevelopment along Primary TOD Streets and opt-in development along Secondary TOD Streets.

To enhance the pedestrian environment surrounding the transit stations, the unobstructed sidewalk width standard and safety buffer width standard apply to all new development and redevelopment along Secondary TOD Streets even if the development does not opt-in to the TOD Standards.

1 | Minimum Pedestrian Realm Width Pedestrian realm width along TOD Streets is measured from back-of-curb to the ground floor building façade. The Transit Corridor Streets and the TOD Streets also designated as Major Thoroughfares generally have wider rights-of-way and can accommodate more pedestrian activities, therefore, the minimum pedestrian

TOD Pedestrian Realm Standards

	Elements	Standards	
		Transit Corridor Streets and TOD Streets designated as a Major Thoroughfare	**All Other TOD Streets**
1	Minimum Pedestrian Realm Width	20'	15'
2	Minimum Unobstructed Sidewalk Width	8'	6'
3	Minimum Safety Buffer Width	4'	
4	Maximum Softscape	35%	
5	Minimum Street Tree Size	3" caliper	2" caliper
6	Fences	The maximum allowable height in the pedestrian realm is 48" in the pedestrian realm. A fence located between the back of curb and the building façade shall be a non-opaque fence.	
7	Auto-Related Uses	No auto-related uses, except: • Driveway(s) perpendicular with the TOD Street; or • Pedestrian drop-off/loading area beyond minimum pedestrian realm width on a Secondary TOD Street where the design is approved by the City Traffic Engineer.	

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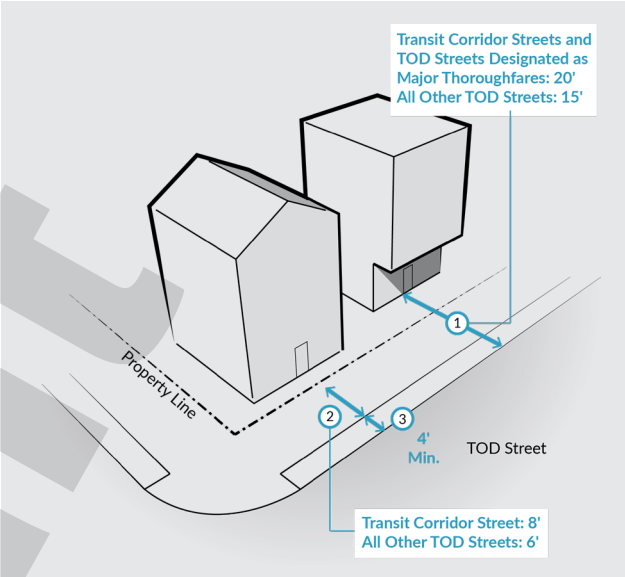
realm width along these streets is 20'. For Transit Corridor Streets with only one vehicular through traffic lane on each direction and all other TOD Streets, the minimum pedestrian realm width is 15'. In addition, when there is on-street cutback parking or a loading area along a TOD Street, a minimum 10' wide pedestrian realm next to the cutback or loading area is allowed. Since the cutback creates a buffer between pedestrians and vehicular traffic, a minimum 10' wide pedestrian realm should be sufficient to accommodate pedestrian activities.

2 | Minimum Unobstructed Sidewalk Within the pedestrian realm, an **unobstructed sidewalk** is required to provide a safe path for people to walk along that is separated from the vehicular traffic. Sidewalk widths shall be commensurate with the level of pedestrian activity desired for the street. There are two options for unobstructed sidewalk width. A minimum 8' wide unobstructed sidewalk is required along Transit Corridor Streets and the TOD Streets also designated as Major Thoroughfares. A minimum 6' wide unobstructed sidewalk is required along Transit Corridor Streets with only one vehicular through-traffic lane on each direction and all other TOD Streets.

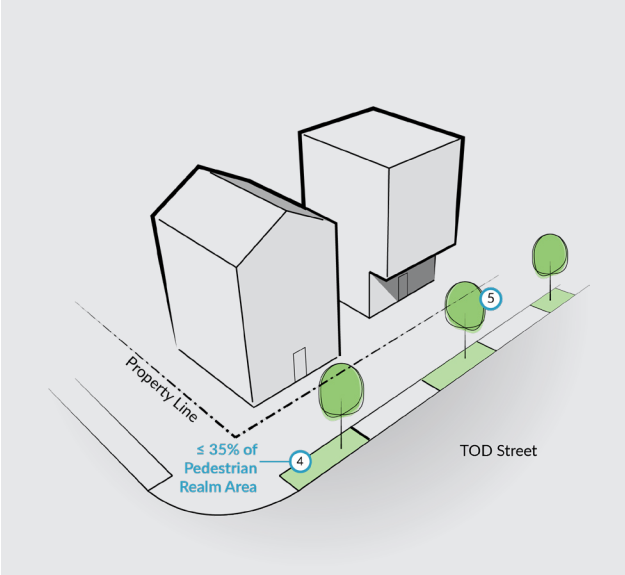
3 | Minimum Safety Buffer Width The safety buffer area is the space between the back-of-curb and the sidewalk. This area may include street furniture and amenities, such as lighting, benches, newspaper kiosks, utility poles, fire hydrants, landscaping, and bicycle parking. The safety buffer area provides a barrier between pedestrians and faster-moving traffic and makes walking a much more enjoyable experience. The minimum safety buffer width is 4 feet.

4 | Maximum Softscape Softscape refers to horticultural elements of landscaping. It includes flowers, plants, shrubs, trees, flower beds etc. Appropriate softscape within the pedestrian realm creates a pedestrian-friendly environment on the street. However, excessive softscape may obstruct the pedestrian path and isolate pedestrians from the

TOD Pedestrian Realm Width



Softscape and Trees



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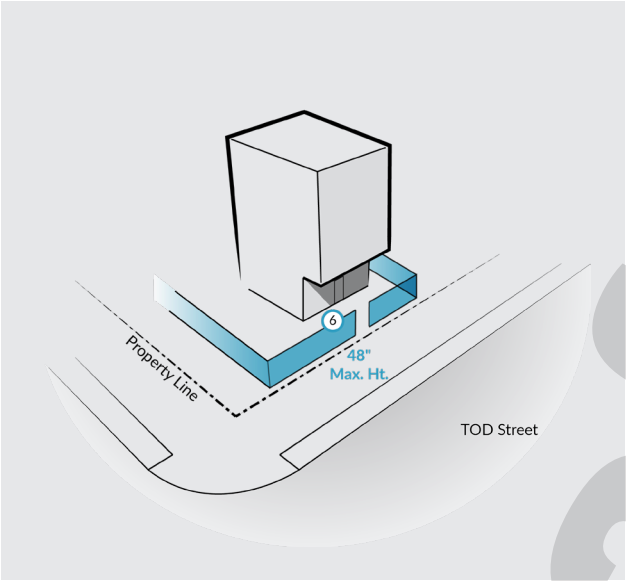
Fencing



adjacent development. The maximum softscape area within the pedestrian realm is 35% of the pedestrian realm's surface area.

5 | Minimum Street Tree Size Properly placed and spaced street trees help to provide shade and separate pedestrians from vehicular traffic. A minimum 3" caliper street tree size is required along Transit Corridor Streets and the TOD Streets also designated as Major Thoroughfares. A minimum 2" caliper street tree size is required along Transit Corridor Streets with only one vehicular through traffic lane in each direction and all other TOD Streets. Street trees planted along a TOD Street must abide by the Code of Ordinances standards in Chapter 33 on species and spacing requirements.

6 | Fences To allow more interaction between pedestrians and the adjacent development along a TOD Street, fences in the pedestrian realm (on public or private property) must be non-opaque and decorative. The maximum fence height is 48".

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TOD Site Design Standards

	Elements	Standards
	Single Family Residential	
1	Lot Access	If a tract is subdivided, lot access must be from a shared driveway, Type 2 Permanent Access Easement, alley, or new public street created by the same subdivision plat
	All Other Uses	
2	Below Grade Structures	Allowed up to the property line
3	Driveway location & dimensions for each property under common ownership or legal interest	Max one 30' wide two-way driveway or two 15' wide one-way driveways along the TOD Street for every 300'. Exceptions: 3A For properties fronting more than one street, no new driveways are allowed along the Primary TOD Street. If two or more streets are TOD Primary Streets, then the property owner may select one street to meet the driveway standards 3B Properties fronting three or more streets may have one non-Primary TOD Street that is exempt from driveway location and dimension requirements

7 | Auto-Related Uses To minimize vehicular pedestrian conflicts within the pedestrian realm, improve pedestrian safety, and create a more enjoyable and comfortable walking experience, no auto-related use is allowed within the pedestrian realm of a TOD Street. There are two exceptions: (1) driveway(s) perpendicular with a TOD Street; (2) pedestrian drop-off and loading areas beyond the minimum pedestrian realm width. Any proposed driveway locations and dimensions as well as pedestrian drop-off and loading areas beyond the pedestrian realm must be approved by the City Traffic Engineer.

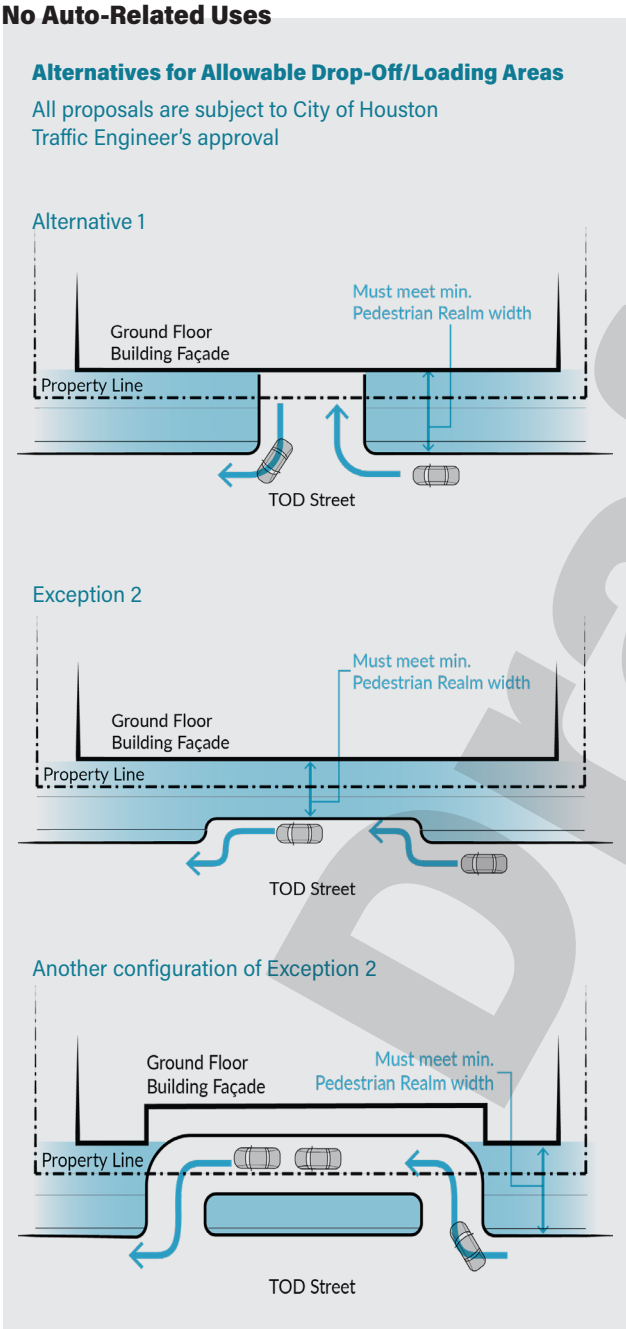
Site Design

Site design has a major impact on the activity, vitality, and safety of the adjacent streets. Active uses (such as retail, lobbies and event spaces) should be placed strategically along pedestrian routes to engage the public. Residential entrances should be designed to provide a graceful transition from public to private. The TOD Program takes different land uses into consideration and establishes two sets of site design standards. One is for single family residential uses, the other is for all other uses.

Single Family Residential Uses In the past two decades, a significant number of narrow homes have been built in the Houston urban area. These homes have front-loading garages and driveways that span the entire lot's width. Often, these homes are built in such quantity along a street that the pedestrian realm is disrupted with one driveway after another. This triggers concerns for pedestrian safety.

Taking vehicular access from a shared drieveway minimizes conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles.

No Auto-Related Uses



To overcome this challenge and preserve a pedestrian friendly environment along TOD Streets, the TOD Program requires a shared lot access for new single family residential homes on subdivided parcels. These newly constructed single family residential houses must access the adjacent TOD Street through either a shared driveway, a *Type 2 Permanent Access Easement* (defined in the City's Code of Ordinances), an alley, or a new public street created by the new subdivision. The shared lot access requirement does not apply to single family residential houses constructed on the original parcels which are not further subdivided.

All Other Uses For uses other than single family residential, parking is a key driver of site planning. It should be placed where it will not disrupt pedestrian spaces. In walkable urban environments, buildings are placed close to streets and public spaces, rather than being set back behind parking lots or expanses of landscaping. Where buildings are set back behind parking lots or landscaping, pedestrians are isolated from uses and activities, exposed to traffic and forced to walk greater distances. For this reason, loading areas, service entrances, and driveways should be limited in size and located where they minimize disruption of pedestrian access.

Specifically, property owners are allowed to provide at most one 30' two-way driveway or two 15' one-way driveways every 300' on their property on a TOD Street. If properties front more than one street, no new driveways are allowed along the Primary TOD Street. If properties front two or more Primary TOD Streets, the property owners can decide on one street to meet the driveway location and dimension standards.

If properties front three or more streets, one non-Primary TOD street may be exempted from driveway location and dimension standards.

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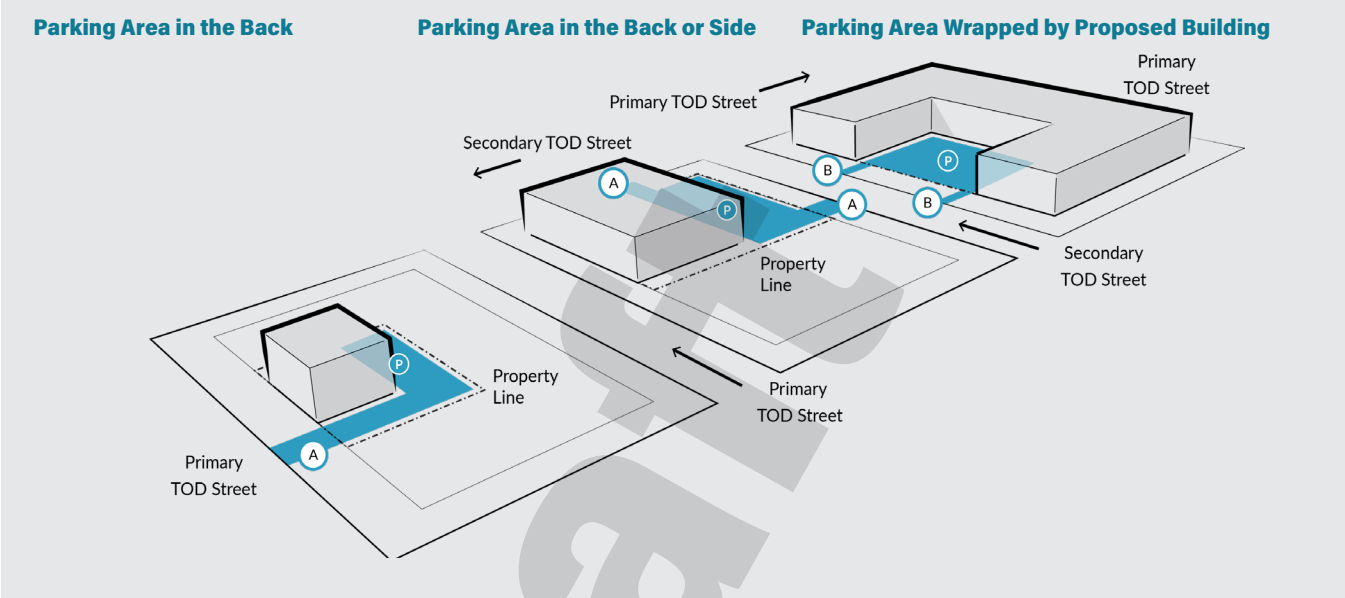
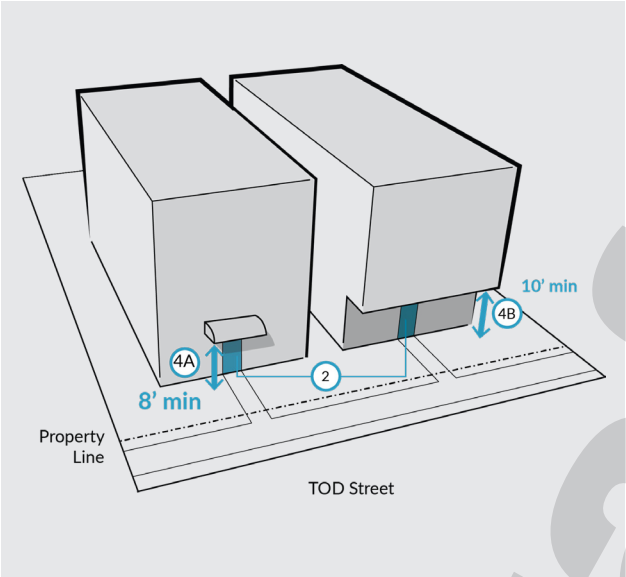
Off-Street Parking on TOD Streets



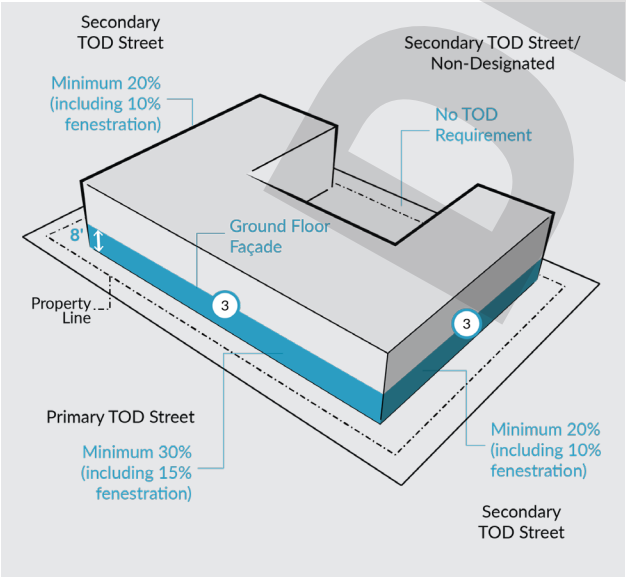
Source: Trong Nguyen/Shutterstock.com

More densely developed land and improved pedestrian elements along METRO routes will increase ridership and maximize the community's investment in the transit infrastructure.

Walkable Places Entrances and Overhead Features



Walkable Places Decorative Features



Building Design

Building design is a critical component to promoting walkability. Buildings should meet and engage people at that scale, with awnings, façade elements, and other features along the pedestrian realm. To promote a pedestrian friendly environment along a TOD Street, the TOD Program establishes two types of ground floor building design. One is for single family residential uses, the other is for all other uses.

Single-Family Residential Generally, buildings with doors and windows provide a source of visual interest. They create a comfortable environment by inviting pedestrians along the street and allowing them to feel connected to what is going on in the adjacent buildings. Considering the nature of single family residential homes, to preserve residential privacy, the TOD Program has no minimum transparency requirements for single-family houses fronting a TOD Street. However, to connect the residential houses with the abutting TOD Street, if a single family residential house is constructed abutting a TOD Street, it is required to have a front door opening to the TOD Street with pedestrian access. The example to the right depicts pedestrian access to a TOD street for the three townhomes on the right-hand side and the one on the bottom left. Conversely, the two interior facing townhomes on the upper left-hand side of the six-unit development have pedestrian access to the shared driveway and are not required to connect directly to a TOD street. This is because they do not abut a TOD street.

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All Other Uses The TOD Program also sets building design standards for all land uses that are not single-family residential, such as commercial, multifamily, mixed-use, industrial, and civic uses. These standards include elements such as public entrances, ground floor decorative features (arrangement of windows, doors, and other features such as murals, artwork, mosaics, photographs, water features, sculptures, plantings or "living walls" on the surface area of the façade between ground level and 8' high of the building), and vertical unobstructed clearances. Together, these standards promote safe, interesting, and comfortable pedestrian experiences along TOD Streets.

To create interaction with the abutting pedestrian realm and the street, property owners should make at least one primary entrance of the building visible and accessible from the abutting TOD Street.

Ground floor decorative features help to enhance the pedestrian's visual environment and acts as "eyes on the street." Along Primary TOD Streets, property owners should provide at least 30% ground floor façade fenestration and decorative features, with a minimum of 15% of the area arranged with windows and building openings. Along Secondary TOD Streets, property owners should provide at least 20%, with a minimum of 10% of the area arranged with windows and building openings.

Overhead architectural features, such as awnings, canopies, trellises or cornice treatments provide shade, reduce heat gain, and enhance a pedestrian friendly environment. These architectural features can be constructed up to the property line if they meet the following two conditions: (1) preserve a minimum 8' unobstructed vertical clearance for shade structures or unenclosed balconies; (2) preserve a minimum 10' unobstructed vertical clearance for overhanging buildable areas.

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TOD Building Design Standards

	Elements	Standards
	Single Family Residential	
1	Front Door Facing the TOD Street with Pedestrian Access	Required for each dwelling unit that abuts the TOD Street
	All Other Uses	
2	Public Entrance to the Pedestrian Realm	Minimum one for each Primary TOD Street and optional on Secondary TOD Streets
3	Ground Floor Fenestration and Decorative Features	Primary TOD Street: Minimum 30% decorative features, including minimum 15% fenestration
		Secondary TOD Street: Minimum 20% decorative features, including minimum 10% fenestration **Exception:** Building fronting three or more TOD Streets may have one non-Primary TOD Street exempt from the fenestration or decorative feature requirement
4	Minimum unobstructed vertical clearance within the pedestrian realm on private property	4A Decorative shade structures/ unenclosed balconies: 8'
		4B Other overhang buildable areas: 10'

Source: Cyclesafe

Bicycle parking within the safety buffer area

Source: Mark Taylor Cunningham/Shutterstock.com

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Off-Street Parking

Since TOD Streets are located close to transit stations, TODs along these streets help to increase transit ridership as well as pedestrian access by creating density in walkable, transit-friendly locations. Off-street parking requirements should consider walkability and the convenience and availability of transit options. While parking is still an essential component within a TOD, overbuilt parking structures are a waste of costly infrastructure and occupy valuable land, consume energy, and increase operating costs. Therefore, the TOD standards require fewer parking spaces.

The TOD program allows property owners to decide the amount of parking spaces needed for their single-family residential development on both Primary and Secondary TOD Streets. Property owners of all other uses on Primary TOD Streets are also given the flexibility to decide how many parking spaces should be allocated for their development. This market-based parking approach can increase buildable area and reduce development costs. Properties developed for all other land uses on Secondary TOD Streets that opt-in to the TOD standards receive a 50% reduction from minimum parking requirements.

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TOD Off-Street Parking Standards

Designation	Off-Street Minimum Parking Standards
Single Family Residential	
Primary and Secondary Streets	No minimum parking requirement (market-based)
All Other Uses	
Primary TOD Street	No minimum parking requirement (market-based)
Secondary TOD Street	50% reduction from minimum parking requirement in Code of Ordinances, Chapter 26
Bicycle Parking	1 bicycle space for every 5,000 square feet of ground floor area
	1 bicycle space for every 20 dwelling units for Multi-Family Residential

Source: Stephanie Ann Sellers/Shutterstock.com

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05.0 | When the Standards Apply

This chapter summarizes what activites and projects will trigger these standards in the designated areas. .

The Walkable Place and TOD standards only apply to new development and redevelopment along Primary Streets or an opt-in development along Secondary TOD Streets.

They do not apply to development that already exists. However, when changes are made to the existing development, the related standards will apply.

If strict compliance of the applicable standards creates undue hardship or impractical development, property owners or developers may file a variance request application against the standards. The Planning Commission will decide whether to grant each variance.

This table below illustrates the development scenarios that trigger the Walkable Place or TOD standards.

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Activity that triggers Walkable Place or TOD Standards

Scenario	Pedestrian Realm Width [1]	Widen Existing Sidewalk	Building and Site Design	Parking Rules
Parking lot modification/expansion, or driveway modification	● [2]	● [2]	●	
Changed use only				●
Interior remodeling without changed use				
Interior remodeling with changed use				●
Exterior remodeling without changed use	●		● [3]	
Exterior remodeling with changed use	●		● [3]	●
Addition (250 sq. ft. or less) within 15' of the minimum pedestrian realm	●		●	●
Addition (250 sq. ft. or more) within 15' of the minimum pedestrian realm	●	●	●	●
Addition (more than 25% of the building sq. ft.) and beyond 15' of the minimum pedestrian realm	●	●	●	●
Addition (less than 25% of the building sq. ft.) beyond and 15' of the minimum pedestrian realm	●			●

[1] Any existing, lawfully permitted physical feature within the pedestrian realm may remain as built.

[2] All new or expanded parking lots are required to meet the respective pedestrian realm width and unubstructed sidewalk width requirements.

[3] Applies when exterior remodeling exceeds 50% of the Ground Floor Façade along a Walkable Place or TOD Street.

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06.0 | Glossary

Decorative Features include: murals, artwork, mosaics, photographs, water features, sculptures, plantings or "living walls", window or door into a habitable area. Signs or advertisements as defined by the Sign Code, dominant paint schemes or construction materials, and basic building elements do not qualify. The Planning Director is authorized to promulgate rules and procedures for the efficient administration of this requirement.

Fenestration is the arrangement of windows and doors on the elevations of a building.

Ground Floor Façade is the area of the building façade measured between the finished floor height of the ground floor and a vertical height of 8 feet.

Pedestrian Realm is the area that includes hardscape, publicly accessible sidewalks, clear pedestrian spaces, pedestrian amenities, softscape, and utilities along the street between the roadway (back-of-curb, where applicable) and the ground floor façade, as applicable. Street Segment is the length of a public street between two intersecting streets, or between an intersecting street and the logical termination of the roadway at a well-defined physical barrier.

Street Segment is the street between two intersecting streets, or between an intersecting street and the termination of the roadway at a well-defined physical barrier.

Transit Corridor Street is the street with the existing or proposed METRO light rail or BRT line.

Transit-Oriented Development Street is a qualified street segment within a ½ mile walking distance from the transit station platform where properties along the street may be eligible for the TOD rules. There are two types of TOD Streets: Primary TOD Street and Secondary TOD Street.

- **Primary TOD Street** is a TOD Street within a 1000-foot walking distance of specific transit stations that is further designated so that TOD rules are required standards.

- **Secondary TOD Street** is a TOD Street within a ½ mile walking distance from the transit station platform where properties along the street may opt-in to the TOD rules.

Walkable Place Street (WP Street) is a street segment designated by the Walkable Places Plan where properties along the street may be eligible for Walkable Places standards. There are two types of WP Streets: Primary Walkable Place Street (Primary WP Street) and Secondary Walkable Place Street (Secondary WP Street).

- **Primary Walkable Place Street (Primary WP Street)** is a Walkable Place Street designated by the Walkable Places Plan where the adjacent properties must meet the applicable Walkable Places standards.

- **Secondary Walkable Place Street (Secondary WP Street)** is a street segment designated on the Walkable Places Plan where adjacent properties may opt-in to the Walkable Places standards. A Secondary WP Street must either: 1) connect directly to a Primary WP Street, or 2) indirectly connect to a Primary WP Street via one or more other Secondary WP Streets.

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Truman Edminster, EHRA Engineering
Bolivar Fraga, Neighborhood Centers, Inc.
Bill Baldwin, Boulevard Realty
Veronica Chapa Gorczynski, Greater East End Management District
David Kim, Urban Land Institute
Greg LeGrande, Near town/ Montrose Super Neighborhood Council
George Levan, Crosspoint Properties
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