

## **Urban and Architectural Design Process and Principles**

The design process is an interrogative process engaged in by a development team. In addition to important questions such as “how do I satisfy my client’s program and budget?” and “how do I solve all the technical aspects of the building?” are a series of questions that must be answered in relation to design. City staff and the Planning Commission and Design Review Subcommittee will also engage in this dialogue with the project team. It is of paramount importance to ask the right questions early during the design process.

This handout is intended to assist the project designer to best understand some of the priorities to consider when designing a project, and how that project will be evaluated by City staff and the decision makers.

### **SITE DESIGN**

The first consideration in the design of any project should be its relationship to its context. In order to reinforce a sense of place, all new development, renovation and additions should be sited and configured to provide an appropriate response to the surrounding context in arrangement on the site, existing topography, existing trees, relationship to the street, and vehicular and pedestrian access. In addition, consideration should be given to solar and wind orientation to maximize sustainability.

These questions are focused on design principles and priorities of the City of West Hollywood. Also refer to applicable design guidelines.

#### **What is the overall site design concept?**

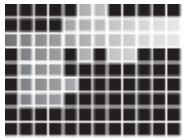
There should be an urban design and architectural concept governing the site design concept. This should also take into account the overall context, development pattern, vehicular and pedestrian access, etc.

#### **Does the landscape design reinforce the overall design concept?**

The landscape design and building design should work together as an integrated whole. The landscape design should complement the site design and architecture.

#### **What is currently on the site, and when was it built?**

If the structure(s) is more than 30 years old, review photographs of the building with the City’s Urban Designer. If it is an identified or potential historic resource under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), further environmental review will be required. If the structure is not an identified historic resource, analysis of the design and construction is necessary if it is to be retained and modified.



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### **Is the property in a historic district or next to a cultural resource?**

There are historic districts, properties, and designated cultural resources in West Hollywood. If your project is within one of these districts or within view of a cultural resource you must identify requirements of the project based on the Secretary of Interior Standards as well as the requirements of the Cultural Heritage Preservation Ordinance. All projects proposed for a West Hollywood Register-listed property, projects that sit within a designated historic district, and those in view of a cultural resource will be subject to review by the Historic Preservation Commission.

### **What is the development pattern on the surrounding blocks?**

A number of factors combine to make up the development pattern of a particular neighborhood, block or street including: block pattern, size, and shape of individual lots; vehicular access to individual sites; configuration of buildings on each site, and relationship of buildings to the street. One or more of these factors can vary in the new development and still maintain respect for and positive association with the existing development pattern. However, if enough of these characteristics are significantly different, the proposal may not be appropriate.

### **Are there characteristics special to the neighborhood?**

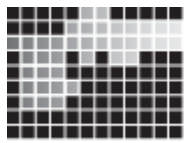
Many neighborhoods have unique characteristics that make the neighborhood distinctive. Characteristics that deserve special attention include overall topography, significant landscape characteristics, uniformity or diversity of buildings in the neighborhood, mass, scale and placement of existing buildings, character of building including quality of construction craft, details and materials.

### **What is the relationship of vehicular access and parking and how does that compare to surrounding properties?**

The location and arrangement of the curb cut, driveway, garage entry and location is an important aspect of the overall site plan. This arrangement could be similar to other properties in the area. Design alternatives that minimize the view of the garage from the street and/or reduce the amount of driveway area are preferred. Vehicular access from an alley or side street is preferred.

### **Along the street frontage of the adjacent blocks, what is the relationship of the buildings to the street?**

The relationship of the building to the street includes the location of the building in relationship to the property lines and to the sidewalk, location and configuration of entries to the site and the building. While there is wide variety within the neighborhood, by looking carefully at the existing context certain common characteristics will become apparent. Not each and every characteristic need be repeated in the new development, but the overall look and feel should be respectful of what exists in order to fit in with the surrounding context.



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### Street Frontage

***Does the building appear inviting from the street?*** The detailing at the street should not only reinforce the overall design concept, but also appear inviting as viewed from the street. The City of West Hollywood has a strong tradition of buildings that are open and active as viewed from the street.

***Are there entries, window openings or other architectural features at the street frontage?*** A sense of openness should be reinforced by open and inviting entries and street facing facades. The main entry of the building should be visible, preferably from the street, and integrated well into the overall design. While an entry feature is important, it should not overwhelm the building or the entire façade.

***If corner site, does building address the corner?*** By their nature, corner sites demand special attention because they are more visible than other lots on the block. Particularly for corner lots, no street façade should appear as if it is the rear or side of the building. Projects and buildings designed for corner sites should pay particular attention to how the project is viewed from the corner and from both streets.

### **What is the solar and wind orientation?**

Buildings should be placed and arranged on the site to maximize opportunities for passive solar and ventilation design.

### **If the site has a sloping topography, does the building and site design follow the topography?**

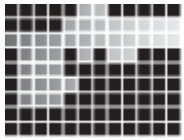
When building on the sloped sites in the City of West Hollywood, it is important for the streetscape and massing to respond to the topography. Grading and construction of retaining walls should be minimized.

### **Does the site design manage stormwater on site (Are Low Impact Development Standards incorporated)?**

Permeable paving and retention areas should be used as much as possible to retain water on site. Low Impact Development Standards should be incorporated wherever possible to retain stormwater on site.

### **Additional site planning considerations:**

What are key streetscape features to consider? Where are utility easements and points of connection? Where is fire department access? What is the look and feel of landscaping in the neighborhood? What is the level of maintenance? Where is open space in the neighborhood and how is it configured? What exterior lighting exists and what would be appropriate for the site and the project?



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### **MASS AND SCALE**

One of the most important and challenging design issues for new architectural projects is to manage new proposals within the existing surrounding building fabric. While new proposals need not copy existing development in order to fit in, managing mass and scale of a new project to respect adjacent development is important to the overall urban design of our districts and our city.

#### **What's the big idea or governing architectural concept?**

Each architectural proposal should have an overall architectural concept that governs design decisions. Evaluation of the project should then include appropriateness of the formal concept, and how successful the execution of the concept is as set forth in the building design.

#### **How does project massing relate to the overall scale of the neighborhood, street and adjacent buildings?**

The mass and scale of the project should provide an appropriate response to the neighborhood context. This does not mean copying what exists on the adjacent sites, as new development is often larger than existing development. However, there must be sufficient architectural recognition and transition of mass and scale to adjacent properties.

#### **Does project massing reinforce overall design concept or does it detract?**

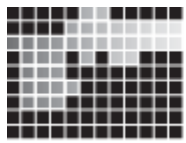
In addition to providing an appropriate response to the context, the mass and scale of the project should reflect the governing design idea(s) of the project. It is essential to identify the location of the open space in the overall configuration of the project in relationship to adjacent structure(s) for the best design and function for the project.

#### **Is scale and proportion of buildings appropriate to the surrounding context?**

A project can be designed to make it appear more monumental or to help diminish the apparent size and scale of its mass. Design decisions of placement of building forms in relation to one another, emphasis of horizontal and vertical elements, size scale and placement of entries, doors, windows and other architectural elements all contribute to the perceived mass and scale of the project. Proper use of these and other design elements make it possible for projects varying in size to be designed to visually fit into the surrounding context.

#### **How are major building elements designed and configured?**

Location and configuration of entries, prominent building elements and features should relate to overall building concept as well as neighborhood pattern, site configuration and slope, relationship to streets and corners, and views to and from the site. Differentiating the building with a hierarchy of architectural elements can also assist in achieving a balanced proportional relationship to the surrounding context and within the project itself.



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### **DESIGN AND DETAILING**

The design and detailing of the building is paramount to a quality environment. The project design should be consistent throughout a project, recognizing that a building is 3-dimensional and must be well designed on all sides.

#### **Are elevations well designed, in scale, proportion, materials, details?**

All buildings should be designed with attention to proper scale and proportion within itself and in relation to its neighbors. All materials and details should be durable and of high quality, to reinforce the overall building design.

#### **Are there a variety of exterior building materials, appropriate for placement and design?**

Materials and colors should be used to reinforce the overall building design. Buildings should not be all stucco- a variety of materials should be used. Materials that are near the ground level and subject to contact by the public should be durable and easily maintained.

#### **What does the roofscape look like?**

Roofs are the fifth elevation of any building and give important character to a building in its massing, materials and details. Solar panels and photovoltaics should be well-integrated into the overall roofscape. All rooftop equipment must be screened.

#### **Do the landscape design and paving materials complement the building?**

The landscape design should enhance the overall site and complement the building(s). There should be a variety of plants that work together well while maintaining mature trees to the greatest extent possible.

#### **What about the lighting design?**

The lighting design should complement the overall building design, with lighting that is not excessive. Spillover light should be avoided and dark sky techniques utilized by reducing or eliminating uplighting. The goal is to light the building and site rather than feature the design of the light fixtures. When fixtures can be seen, their design should be appropriate to the overall project.

#### **Is signage necessary for project or site?**

A sign program is required for multi-tenant commercial buildings. The intent of a sign program is to unify the signage consistent and complementary to the building design. All signage should be appropriate in size, style, location, color and materials to the overall project. Signs should not be too numerous or too large and should not visually overpower the site or structure.

***If you have any design-related questions call Stephanie Reich, Urban Designer at  
323.848.6497***