TIRZ #3 Downtown Living Chapter 380 Program

Downtown Redevelopment Authority
& Downtown Management District

Exhibit A:
Design Guidelines

A. INTENT

The purpose of the following guidelines is to promote a robust, walkable neighborhood in the TIRZ #3 boundaries in Downtown Houston. Many new buildings in Downtown already comply with these guidelines. However, individual developments are often not coordinated with one another, resulting in a discontinuous pedestrian environment. In providing these guidelines, the goal is to ensure that property owners' efforts to provide a pleasant, walkable environment surrounding their buildings will coalesce into a continuous neighborhood.

Substantial public investment has improved most of the streetscape in the target area. It is the intent of these guidelines to maintain or further enhance this past investment.

B. STREET CLASSIFICATION

For the purposes of these guidelines, the streets within the program boundaries have been classified into the following types:

Main Street: Comparable to an A Street. However, Main Street has received additional investments over time and is a major feature of Downtown. Therefore, any buildings developed along Main Street should favor Main Street as an important pedestrian corridor.

A Streets: Primary pedestrian streets

B Streets: Secondary pedestrian streets (pedestrian-oriented streets with some potential building services)

C Streets: Vehicular / service streets

(Refer to Figure 1 for map of street types and boundaries for TIRZ #3.)

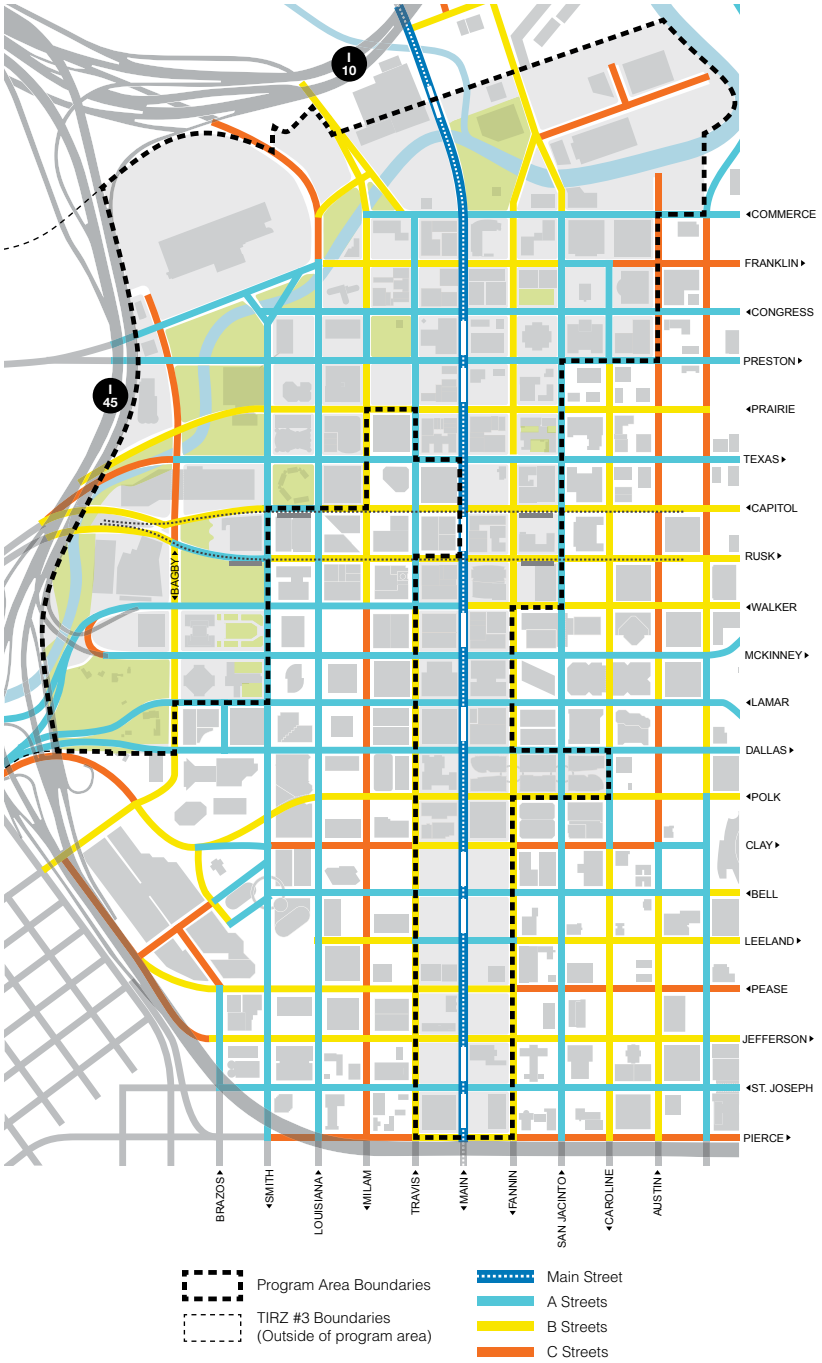

Figure 1 Street Classifications

C. SIDEWALK REQUIREMENTS

1. Scope. Existing sidewalk conditions must be maintained or improved. Any sidewalks that have been altered during the construction process must be restored to their original condition or better. Minimum requirements for sidewalks are as follows:

Minimum 13' sidewalks at A streets: 5' planting zone and 8' clear zone

Minimum 11' sidewalks at B streets: 5' planting zone and 6' clear zone

Minimum 10' sidewalks at C streets: 5' planting zone and 5' clear zone

Main Street features wider than average (approximately 17' wide) sidewalks. The existing dimensions should be maintained.

2. Description. Planting zone shall include irrigated street trees and may also include other landscape elements, street furniture, etc. (see Figure 2).

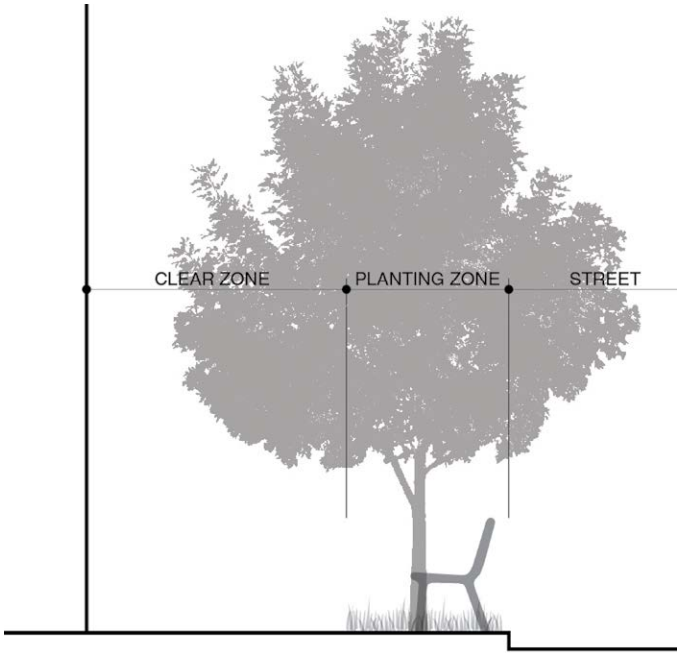

Figure 2 Sidewalk configuration.

D. BUILDING PLACEMENT

1. Building setback. Building frontage should extend to within 5' of the property line along at least 75% of the frontage at all streets.

Exception: Buildings may have an additional setback for the purposes of sidewalk café or other public uses (see Figure 3). Note that sidewalk cafes within the public right-of-way must be permitted through the City of Houston Department of Public Works & Engineering.

2. Building entrances. Primary building entrances should be located along A streets. If a building has Main Street frontage, public entrances should be provided along Main Street. If the building does not have frontage along an A street, the primary entrance should be located along a B street.

3. Building services. Building services such as garage entries, loading docks, solid waste collection areas, electrical and mechanical vaults, exhaust fans, etc., should be located primarily along C streets. These elements should be screened from pedestrian view to the greatest extent possible. Loading docks should be recessed into the building mass such that sidewalks remain clear of loading or service vehicles.

Building services should be avoided on A streets, especially Main Street. Some building services may be located along B streets if necessary, but they should be screened appropriately with architectural and/or landscape elements.

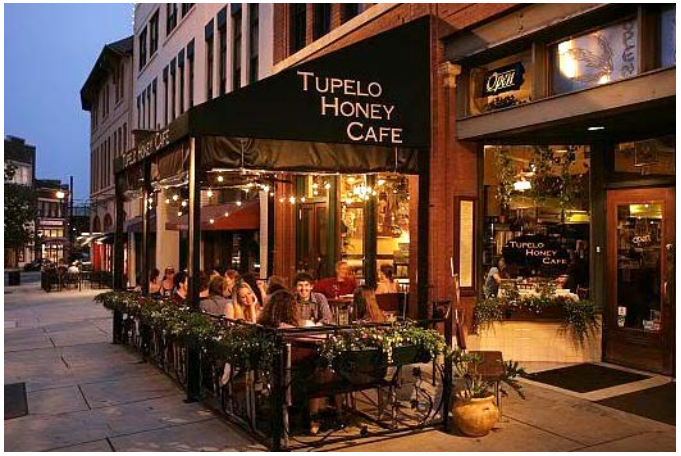

Figure 3 Sidewalk cafes can contribute to the street life, incorporate green space, and invite passersby into the building. Property owners may choose to provide an additional setback in order to accommodate sidewalk cafes. Photo Credit Tupelo Honey Café.

4. Curb cuts. Driveway curb cuts, including garage or parking ingress and egress, should be avoided on A streets.

Curb cuts are not permitted on Main Street.

Driveway curb cuts should be limited to 2 per block face on B streets and should be limited to maximum 24' wide. Curb cuts should be spaced apart from each other and from street intersections.

Driveway curb cuts needed for building services should be located along C streets; however, curb cuts should be limited to the greatest extent possible.

Where driveway curb cuts are provided, they should not interrupt the surface of the sidewalk if possible (see Figure 4).

All driveway curb cuts must comply with requirements set forth by the City of Houston Department of Public Works & Engineering.

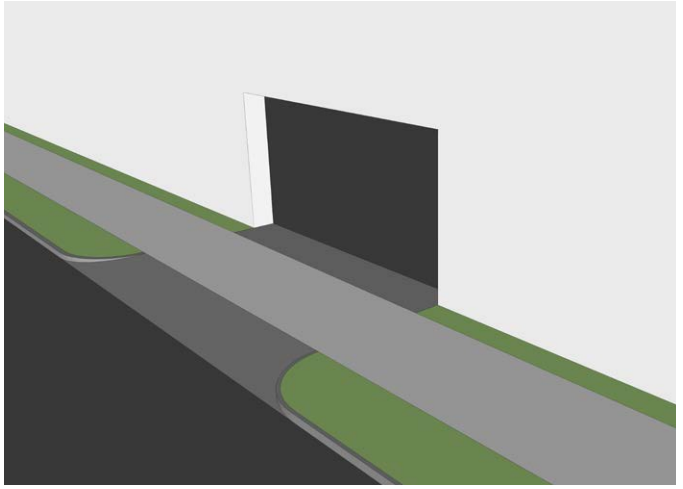

Figure 4 Continuing the sidewalk surface across the curb cut can lessen the impact of the cuts.

E. GROUND FLOOR USES

1. A Streets. Ground floors facing A streets should contain active uses. For sites adjacent to Main Street, Main Street is the priority A street for ground floor uses. While retail is the preferred ground floor use, other acceptable uses include public building spaces such as lobbies, common building amenities, fitness facilities, open office space, live/work space, day care centers, etc. (see Figure 5). Regardless of initial use, all ground floors facing A streets should be configured such that they may accommodate retail in the future.

2. B Streets. While ground floors facing B streets should also contain active uses to the greatest extent possible, they may contain other uses, such as residential and office. Uses such as building services, storage, and structured parking should be avoided to the greatest extent possible along B streets.

Figure 5 Other building uses, such as an indoor swimming pool for residents, may provide an active ground floor and enrich the pedestrian experience. Photo Credit Joe Aker.

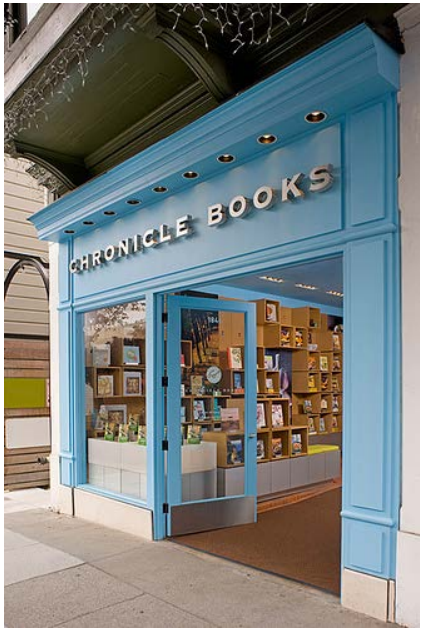

Figure 6 Transparent windows add visual interest and a perception of safety and are inviting to passersby. Photo Credit Chronicle Books.

F. GROUND FLOOR DESIGN

1. Transparency. Glazed fenestration should be provided on at least 60% of the wall area of the ground level between 3 and 8 feet above grade on all A streets and at least 40% of the wall area on B streets (see Figure 6).

All glazing on ground-floor, street or public open space-facing facades should have a Visible Transmittance Rating of 0.6 or higher. Any exceptions should be temporary such as an applied film and must be approved by Houston Downtown Management District (Downtown District).

On A and B streets, the distance between glazed openings should not exceed 50 feet in length.

2. Materials. Ground floors should feature high-quality, durable materials. EIFS should not be used.

3. Articulation. Ground floor facades on all street types should be articulated through materials, changes in depth, etc. in a manner that responds to the pedestrian scale. This is especially important on facades where glazing is not an option.

4. Public entrances. Public entrances should be oriented to the street.

5. Lighting. Applicants are encouraged to incorporate architectural lighting that contributes to ambiance and enhances the pedestrian realm.

G. PARKING

1. Placement of parking. Ground floor parking should be avoided along building frontage at A and B streets.

2. Architectural treatment of parking. Along all streets, parking garages should be architecturally integrated within buildings. Views of cars and garage lighting should be screened with architectural and/or landscape elements. This applies to upper floors as well as lower floors (see Figures 7 and 8).

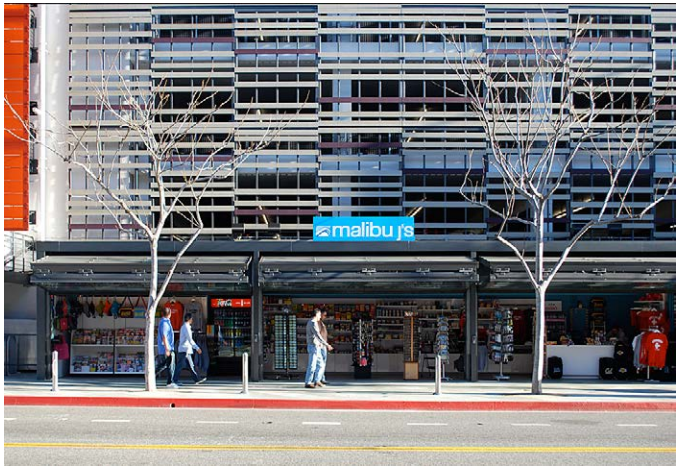

Figure 7 This garage uses architectural elements to screen cars at the upper floors while providing retail at the ground floor. Photo Credit John Edward Linden.

Figure 8 Christ Church Garage in Downtown Houston combines architectural screening, greenery, and landscape features such as a fountain and covered walkway to screen cars and create a pleasant pedestrian environment.

H. STREET TREES

1. Street tree preservation. Street trees should be preserved wherever possible. Mature trees (those having a caliper 12 inches or more) in particular should be preserved.

2. Street tree replacement. Should it be necessary for an applicant to remove any street tree, the tree(s) should be restored to the same site from which they were removed in accordance with City of Houston street tree requirements. Applicants are encouraged to restore the greatest number of caliper inches of tree as possible to the site. Contributions to the City of Houston Tree Fund should be made only after the applicants have planted the maximum number of caliper inches of trees as is feasible within the constraints of the site and in accordance with City of Houston requirements.

I. UTILITIES

The majority of TIRZ #3 is currently served by underground utilities. In those locations where it is not, building electrical service should be designed with underground electrical vaults for future access to underground utilities.

J. SUSTAINABILITY

By simply building a multi-family residential project Downtown, applicants are already addressing many tenets of sustainability (density, walkability, access to public transit, etc.).

Additionally, applicants must comply with and are encouraged to exceed City of Houston's Energy Code.

Applicants are also encouraged to incorporate other sustainable measures, especially those that reduce water use and address thermal comfort. As Downtown residential projects have limited open space within their property limits, applicants are encouraged to design roofs with a high solar reflectance index and/or vegetated roofs in order to reduce urban heat island effect (see Figure 9).

Figure 9 Green roofs are not only an amenity, improving adjacent views and/or providing occupiable space to residents, but they are also a sustainable feature that can improve building insulation and reduce rainwater run-off. Photo credit www.asla.org.

K. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Building designs should also take into consideration other design features that promote a pedestrian-friendly environment. These may include shade structures such as overhangs, awnings, exterior lighting, landscaping, etc. (see Figure 10).

L. ALTERNATIVE EQUIVALENCE COMPLIANCE

1. Scope and purpose. To encourage creative and original design, and to accommodate projects where the particular site conditions or proposed use prevent strict compliance with the guidelines, alternative equivalence compliance allows development to occur in a manner that meets the intent of these guidelines, yet through an alternative design that does not strictly adhere to the guidelines (see Figure 11).

2. Procedure. In addition to required application materials, applicants who wish to use the alternative equivalence compliance must submit written and graphic information that demonstrates how the project meets the intentions of the above guidelines. Applicants may wish to meet with Downtown Redevelopment Authority and Downtown District staff to discuss alternative compliance concept proposals prior to submittal.

M. CITY OF HOUSTON CODES AND ORDINANCES

Should any of the above guidelines conflict with any City of Houston code or ordinance, the City of Houston code or ordinance shall take precedence.

Figure 10 The incorporation of an overhang provides shade and shelter for pedestrians and potential sidewalk cafes, and creates a more inviting pedestrian environment.

Figure 11 This residential building is an example of Alternative Equivalence Compliance. While it does not have active ground floor uses, it generally meets the intent of the guidelines and creates a pleasant experience for both the residents and pedestrians. Photo Credit *thegoodstreet.blogspot.com.*