

FORM-BASED CODE and SEPA INFILL EXEMPTION FOR DOWNTOWN COVINGTON

DESIGN STANDARDS SUMMARY

May 2020

This document summarizes the status of common urban design guidelines and standards in Covington. It notes whether Covington regulates specific design issues, and if so, where and how the issue is addressed. This document will be used to help formulate the new form-based code.

Block Frontage & Circulation

Block Frontage

Covington currently has block frontage standards in the *Downtown Design Guidelines and Standards*, section C. They are structured based on Street Types 1-4, which are mapped.

The block frontage elements addressed include:

- Minimum building frontage/placement
- Minimum retail space dimensions
- Parking location
- Building entry location and design
- Minimum ground floor façade transparency
- Minimum weather protection

Required ground level use is covered in CMC 18.31.080 Permitted land uses (footnotes #8, 13, 23, and 26). A specific prohibited ground-level use is structured parking that fronts onto 171st Avenue SE. These use standards are mostly based on zone or cover all of Downtown, and they are not synced with the street types map. There is room for improvement, including streamlined organization and relaxing the restrictiveness of the standards. More is discussed in audit table 2.

Minimum sidewalk width is discussed in the circulation section. Notably, it is assumed that the entirety of sidewalk width will be in existing or dedicated public right-of-way.

The transparency zone requirement is partially duplicated in section B.2.c. It provides a basic requirement of 40 percent that is increased if the property is mapped by one of the Street Types 1-4 in section C.

Overall, the current block frontage standards are generally comprehensive and could be partially or wholly carried forward. Some updates to numerical standards based on best

practices or modern construction techniques may be needed. A clearer map or series of maps may be warranted, along with additional graphics and photos to support the standards.

Circulation

Covington has circulation standards in several locations. The circulation elements addressed include, by source:

- *Downtown Design Guidelines and Standards*, section B. Scattered throughout this section:
 - Sidewalk zone dimensions and design
 - Pedestrian pathways through parking lots
 - Drive-through location and design
 - Trail connections
- *Downtown Design Guidelines and Standards*, section C. Each Street Type 1-4 includes:
 - Sidewalk width and design
 - Vehicular travel lane design
 - Landscaping design
- CMC Chapter 18.50 Developing Standards - Parking and Circulation. Sections applicable to Downtown include:
 - Drive-through location and design
 - Off-street parking plan design standards
 - Internal circulation street standards (refers to Chapter 12.60, Street Standards)
 - Trail improvement and connection standards

Internal pedestrian circulation for large, multi-building developments is not addressed.

Design of internal streets is not clearly addressed, and may require accessing the City's adopted street standards outside of code.

There are disparate standards for drive-throughs that could potentially be consolidated for citywide use. Screening and landscaping are only briefly mentioned in CMC Chapter 18.50 and could be expanded.

Generally, the circulation standards for Downtown could be better organized and expanded with further details that enhance the safety and attractiveness of the pedestrian environment. Additional graphics and photos are needed to support the standards.

Site Planning & Design

Side Yard Light/Air Access and Privacy

This topic is not addressed. It is recommended to be included in the form-based code to guide the design of adjacent multi-story buildings that are envisioned for Downtown.

Internal Open Space

This topic is unaddressed except for sidewalk-facing public spaces that are required for a FAR bonus. See the *Downtown Design Guidelines and Standards*, section B.1.i.

Staff have inadvertently been applying the citywide standards for multifamily open space (CMC 18.35.160) and have stated new standards for Downtown are needed. The existing citywide standards still could be used as a starting point - see the audit table 2 for detailed observations.

Service Areas and Mechanical Equipment

This is addressed in the *Downtown Design Guidelines and Standards*, section B.1.e and section B.2.g. There are overlaps between the two sections, and ground-based and roof-mounted issues are grouped together.

The current standards are fair starting points, however, and could be retained in the form-based code. Issues of location, design, and screening could be further detailed. Improved organization is needed, along with more robust graphic and photo support.

Building Design

Massing and Articulation

This topic is covered in two locations in the *Downtown Design Guidelines and Standards*:

- Section B offers general guidance:
 - Requires prominent entrances marked by architectural elements
 - Establishes top/middle/bottom distinctions for buildings taller than 30 feet
 - Requires architectural consistency
 - Encourages upper story expression
 - Articulation feature requirements
 - Maximum roofline ridge length is 80 feet
- Section C for Street Types 1-4:
 - Street facades should be divided into bays
 - Upper-level setbacks above the third floor of 5-10 feet, depending on the Street Type
 - Provide other distinguishing architectural changes for stepped back floors

Covering the same topic in two different locations could lead to confusion or conflict. Within section C there is some duplication between the Street Types. Other guidance such as maximum articulation intervals, roofline modulation, and maximum façade length are omitted.

The number of articulation features required under B.2.6 is fairly restrictive. Consider applying upper-level stepbacks across a whole zone or uniformly for all buildings taller than a certain height, as an alternative to properties with specific street frontages. Audit table 3 provides more feedback.

Building Details - Façade

This topic is covered in two locations in the *Downtown Design Guidelines and Standards*:

- Section B address ground-level details specifically in B.2.b.
 - Requires four of 10 listed features for commercial and mixed-use buildings, such as decorative masonry and kick plates
 - Requires residential units to be elevated 2 feet above the sidewalk and have an entry from the street
- Section C for Street Types 1, 2, and 4 has additional provisions:
 - Requires six of 10 listed features for commercial and mixed-use buildings

The façade design options and requirements are a good start and could be carried forward and expanded. Additional photo examples are recommended.

Building Details - Windows

Windows are referenced throughout the *Downtown Design Guidelines and Standards* but they do not have a dedicated section. Excluding façade transparency, windows are addressed in the following locations:

- Section B
 - Window sills and window box planters are options for ground floor commercial facades
 - Upper floor ribbon windows are discouraged
 - Window details are one of several requirements for meeting the articulation standard
 - Window patterns are one of several options for meeting the zone transition requirements
- Section C
 - Larger windows and different window designs are options to meet the requirements for major building entries
 - Window sills and window box planters are, again, options for ground floor commercial facades
 - Change in window designs is an option to meet the requirement for stepped back upper floors

While each of the above references are generally appropriate, more guidance on the specifics of window design is recommended. Special issues for street-facing facades are options for window recessing, trim, and reflective glass. Graphics or photo examples are needed.

Materials

Materials are referenced throughout the *Downtown Design Guidelines and Standards*, and they have dedicated, duplicative sections among Street Types.

- Section B
 - Stone, masonry, or decorative concrete are required for the base of 30+ feet tall buildings
 - Textured, colored, or patterned material are required as an articulation feature
 - Higher quality materials are one of several options for meeting the zone transition requirements
- Section C, Street Types 1, 2, and 4
 - Buildings shall employ durable and high-quality materials that show permanence and quality, such as glass, steel, brick, stone, wood, etc.
 - The use of sustainably harvested, salvaged, recycled or reused products is encouraged

While the existing provisions are generally appropriate, further standards for commonly problematic materials are recommended. Standards of proportion and design should be added specifically for concrete blocks, exterior insulation and finish system, metal, and cementitious wall board paneling - along with photo examples. Material standards are a matter of general aesthetic interest and should generally be consolidated to apply to larger areas than specifically mapped streets.

Blank Walls

This topic has a dedicated section B.2.d in the *Downtown Design Guidelines and Standards*. Blank walls must be mitigated with at least five of 11 listed features.

This section offers a broad definition (“any wall that does not have windows”). Further graphic support for the toolbox is recommended. See audit table 3 for further feedback.